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THE ABBESS,

John Norton.

A ROMANCE.

London.

BY THE AUTHOR

OF THE "DOMESTIC MANNERS OF THE AMERICANS," &c.

J'ai vu l'impie adoré sur la terre ;
Pareil au cedre il cachait dans les cieux
Son front audacieux ;
Il semblait à son gré gouverner le tonnerre,
Foulait aux pieds ses ennemis vaincus :
Je n'ai fait que passer—il n'était déjà plus.

RACINE.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE ABBESS.

CHAPTER I.

Un cœur sensible craint le repos qu'il ne connaît pas.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

THE castle of Albano, situated at the north western extremity of the Venetian Gulf, about half-way between Aquilea and Villa Franca, was one of the noblest private dwellings in Italy. It is now in ruins, but the relics which remain are sufficient to show both its magnificent extent, and the proud style of its architecture.

A too stately habitation is a heavy tax upon the owner of it; while it excites the pride of pomp, it exhausts the means of sustaining it, and it sometimes happens that the straightened heir is obliged to submit, within its lofty chambers, to

embarrassments and privations which he would have never known, had his paternal halls been burnt to the ground before he saw the light.

Theodore, the seventh Count d'Albano, who was in possession of the splendid castle of his forefathers at the time this narrative commences, felt this inconvenience strongly. So many retainers fed at his table, and so many more were maintained from his buttery, that his rents and revenues often fell short of his wants.

It did not, however, occur to him, that the dismissal of half this useless number might relieve him from his embarrassment; he thought but of the means by which his little son could maintain as many, and, as was usual in such cases, the only plan which suggested itself, was the obtaining a wealthy marriage for him, and consigning his only sister to the cloister.

Urgent as the necessity certainly was for some such measures, the Count d'Albano, while deeply intent upon putting them in practice, was too proud to confess, even to himself, that it was his poverty which drove him to do so; nor were

there wanting good and plausible reasons whereby to persuade himself and others, that he was actuated by nobler motives. That the high born Count d'Albano should seek a suitable alliance for his son, could excite neither surprise nor censure in any one, and that so pious a catholic should desire to dedicate a child to the church, was equally natural and laudable. The various circumstances which arose from the prosecution of one of these schemes, and the ultimate result of it, will form the subject of the following narrative.

On the 19th of June 1575, the day on which our story begins, every thing in the castle d'Albano announced the bustle of preparation for some important event. From the stately Count himself, issuing his commands from the hall of audience, wherein he delighted to keep his state, to the little lackey boy, whose business it was to obey every menial in the establishment, all, with one single exception, were actively engaged in preparing for the arrival of Geraldine d'Albano, abbess of one of the wealthiest convents of

female Dominicans in Italy, and sister to the present Count.

Twenty years before, she had left her father's castle at the age of eighteen, to commence her noviciate in the convent of Sant' Catherina's, near Ancona. At her own earnest request, the usual period of probation was curtailed, and she took the veil within a year after her entering the cloister.

From that period to the present, her life had been marked by devotion so profound, and zeal so unshrinking, that her fame had gradually spread itself over the whole Christian world.

On the demise of the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, Geraldine d'Albano, though only thirty-two years of age, was appointed to replace her; and her youth was soon forgotten in the strict discipline, the undeviating sanctity, and absolute authority of her rule.

So great was the reputation which this extraordinary woman obtained in the church, that few chapters of high importance were held in any part of Italy, to which she was not invited; but

it was rarely that she did more than offer her prayers for the Catholic purity and wisdom of their decisions; three times, however, she had quitted her convent to assist at chapters, wherein affairs of extensive and important interest to the church were discussed, and each time she had swayed the judgment of her coadjutors in a manner so remarkable, as to have drawn upon her, in some quarters, the imputation of witchcraft; but this only served to exalt her higher in the estimation of others, and her name was honoured at Rome as that of one of the brightest ornaments of her sacred profession.

Lady Juliet d'Albano, the young niece of this celebrated lady, was the only person in the castle who shared not the pride and pleasure which her expected arrival excited.

Her mind was indeed in a state of most painful anxiety respecting the object of this visit; for many concurrent circumstances had given her reason to believe that her father intended she should return to Ancona with this dreaded aunt, and her fears suggested that this could only be

with a view of her ultimately becoming a member of her community.

It would be difficult, perhaps, to persuade any beautiful young girl of sixteen, to whom life had hitherto offered no greater vexation than might arise in the taming a wild bird, or teaching a frolicsome kid to follow her,—that happiness and goodness were only to be found within the shelter of a convent: but with Juliet the case was worse still, for her young heart had been already touched by that deep, overwhelming feeling of attachment, which must make any destiny dreadful, that banishes the object of it.

Under these circumstances, it is scarcely to be wondered at, if the young Juliet did not regard these zealous preparations with any feeling of pleasure.

“What a tumult is here!” she exclaimed, as she entered from a walk on the terrace which stretched its ample length along one side of the castle, “What are they about now, Olive?”

The waiting-maid who followed, stepped quickly to her side, and answered the question

with an air of more deference for the things spoken of, than for the beautiful young girl she addressed.

“Holy mother ! Signora, cannot you see that they are bearing the golden candlesticks from the altar in the chapel, and the flowers, and the silver Christ, and the beautiful little Virgin, and the best embroidered altar-cloth ? Cannot you see that they are carrying them across the hall to the great stair-case ?”

The pious waiting-maid crossed herself without ceasing, as she made the enumeration.

“I wonder Father Laurence chooses to have his chapel despoiled thus,” said the young lady, “I protest I think it looks very like sacrilege.”

“You forget whom it is done for, Signora, or for certain you would never say that wicked word.”

And again the black-eyed damsel crossed herself.

“No, indeed, Olive, I do not forget,” returned her lady; “I neither do, nor can forget, that my lady abbess aunt comes here to-morrow

—I suppose all these holy things are for her chamber?”

“ Yes, Signora—that is, not exactly for her chamber, but for her oratory.”

“ And our pretty chapel? Pray, is she never to enter the chapel, Olive? Methinks the stripping that of all its ornaments, is a strange way of preparing for so holy a lady.”

“ Santa madre de Dio! to hear you talk, Signora, as if Father Laurence would forget the chapel! Good pious man! I am sure he has been labouring with all his might to make it fifty times more beautiful than ever.”

“ And how has he contrived to do it, Olive, after all the best things have been carried away?”

“ Is it possible, Signora, that you have never heard of all the beautiful glories we have borrowed from the church of the Santa Croce?”

“ No, indeed,” replied Lady Juliet, with an absent air; “ I know nothing about it.”

“ They are all to be put up for vespers to-night, Signora.—Good Father Laurence told me all his plans, and he took me himself this morn-

ing to see where the holy lady's oratory is to be. 'Tis only what we used to call the east closet, inside the state chamber, but you will not know it again, when it is all finished. I will ask Father Laurence to let you look at it, Signora, when it is quite complete."

"It shall not need, Olive. When the apartments are prepared, I shall inspect them."

Apparently but little daunted by the haughty tone in which these last words were spoken, the flippant Abigail continued to prattle forth her observations and intelligence, as she followed her lady, who now moved on through the hall.

Lady Juliet opened the door of a saloon, which had been hitherto almost entirely appropriated to her use. Its ample oriel windows gave it an air of peculiar cheerfulness; and it was here that she best loved to pursue her occupations: but on now entering it, she was struck by a general change in the appearance of the room, the absence of many articles she had left there the night before, and the introduction of several others.

“How is this, Olive? Surely my own parlour might have been left untouched. Where is my cithern?—and the volume I was reading?—and my embroidery?—this is more like desolation, than preparation.”

“The saints guide us, Signora! It is really a wonder to hear you speak in that manner. There is nobody else in the castle, from the highest to the lowest, but would willingly have every thing belonging to them turned topsy-turvy, only for leave to look upon the Abbess, and that, even on their bare knees; yet you, who I dare say will be permitted to sit down in her presence, seeing she is own sister to my lord the Count, you seem to do nothing but complain, because some of your worldly things are put out of the way, to make room for her heavenly ones!”

“I would have all suitable preparation made for the arrival of my aunt,—but there can be no occasion to derange my sitting-room for that purpose.”

“May the holy virgin forgive you, Signora! Shall I tell Father Laurence what you say?—

dear good man ! I believe he would cry for vexation."

Lady Juliet made no reply, but placing her veil and gloves in the hands of her attendant, advanced into the room, and stood gazing at the altered appearance it presented. Then turning to her maid, who was still standing at the door, she bade her send her page.

The girl departed, and Juliet seated herself at one of the large windows. It was the view from this window, which beyond any other circumstance, had first occasioned her preference for this apartment; and, in truth, Italy herself could hardly have furnished a lovelier landscape.

There were blue mountains for the back ground, and, nearer the eye, flowery upland pastures, stretching out to a dark forest of oak and chesnut.

But the most beautiful point, to the taste of Juliet, was where the sea became visible through a narrow defile to the left. The high ground on which the castle stood sunk immediately be-

yond the boundary of the garden, to the level of a little mountain stream, which, turning at that point almost at right angles, continued its rapid way towards the sea, between two steep banks, tufted with innumerable flowering shrubs. The eye was led through this beautiful opening, till at the distance of a mile it rested upon the bright bosom of the Adriatic.

On the farther side of this brook, the ground rose again, to an elevation nearly equal to that of the noble site on which the castle stood.

The sea is always a delightful object, and the portion of it visible from this favourite window possessed the additional interest of being frequently animated by a passing sail. The small sea-port of Torre Vecchia was situated at a short distance from the castle, and though not a place of much mercantile importance, many passing vessels used its sheltered little harbour and commodious landing-place, either for the sake of safety during rough weather, or for the private accommodation of individuals.

It was at Torre Vecchia, that the celebrated Abbess of Sant' Catherina's was expected to land, within the next twenty-four hours.

It might be either with the hope, or the fear, of already seeing the bark which bore the Abbess, that Juliet now fixed her eyes earnestly on a small vessel that had just appeared in sight. She would have given much to distinguish the colours of the little flag which floated from its mast, but it was impossible.

While she was still occupied in gazing at this distant object, the door opened, and a boy entered, who, from his stature, appeared not more than seven or eight years of age; but there was a keenness of intelligence in his bright blue eye, that seemed to indicate an intellect of older growth. Having carefully stopped to close again the heavy door, which to his tiny hands was no easy task, he sprung across the room, and dropping on his knees before the young lady, kissed her hands.

“ You sent for me, Signora ? ”

“ Yes, I did, Morgante; but I fear the morn-

ing task is hardly over yet. What said Father Laurence to my summons?"

"He laid his hand upon my head, and said, 'Go boy, go—you have done well to-day;'—and then—'come hither, Olive, I would speak with you.'"

The boy mimiced the good Father's voice, in a way that brought an irresistible smile to the face of his young mistress—yet she shook her head, and was about to chide him, when he exclaimed,—

"And how do you like it all, Signora?"

As he asked the question, he jumped upon his feet, and skipped round the room, pointing to all the innovations the apartment exhibited.

"Is not this grand, Signora?" bowing with mimic reverence before a small table, covered with cloth of gold, on which was laid a huge volume of rich and massive binding.

"And is not this holy?" he continued, pointing to a frame which lay beside it, containing the mystic emblem of two bleeding hearts.

A chair of state was placed near this table, with a velvet cushion on a stool before it. On this the little Morgante knelt, and bent forward, as if to kiss the feet of some one seated there. Then making the sign of the cross, he dropped his hands by his sides, and remained kneeling before the empty chair, with a look of whimsical veneration.

“Out upon thee, Morgante!” exclaimed Juliet laughing, “how am I to frame my features into decent gravity, if you play those monkey tricks before me?”

“Do not fear, Signora—when she is here in good earnest, you will only need to look at me, if you want to learn how it behoves a good Catholic to behave in the presence of a saint of the church.”

Juliet smiled, but in a moment checked herself; “you would not be so gay, Morgante, if you knew as much as I do, about this visit.”

“What do you know, Signora?” said the child, suddenly ceasing his grimaces, and coming close to her side,—“what do you know?”

“Nay, I can hardly say I know; but I suspect much suffering is in store for me. I fear—I fear ——.”

“Tell me all you fear then,” said the boy putting his arms behind him, and shaking his curls back from his face. As he did so, his countenance expressed a degree of feeling and intelligence, so greatly beyond his apparent age, as painfully to show that either accident or disease had stunted the growth of the little creature, to whom this too speaking face belonged.

Such was, indeed, the fact; Morgante was near twelve years old, and nature, as if to atone, as she often does, for diminutive stature, had given him a mind, which already surpassed in acuteness of perception, and firmness of temper, those of many men.

Fortunately his health was unimpaired, and the strength and activity of his limbs greatly exceeded what their appearance promised.

“Tell me all you fear,” said Morgante; “is it impossible for me to help you?”

“Alas ! I fear so—what can you do for me ? My fear is, Morgante, that my father will insist upon my returning with my aunt to her convent—and then—that I should take the veil there.”

Tears started to the eyes of Juliet as she spoke.

“You see, Morgante,” she resumed, “that neither you, nor those stronger than you, can help me, if this be so.”

“But I can go to the Count, and tell him that Heaven will punish him, if he dare do aught so wicked.”

“And what would that avail, poor boy ? You would be given over to the discipline of Father Laurence, and I should not the less be made to follow this dreadful Abbess to her convent.”

“You shall not follow her against your will,” said the boy sturdily. “But why do you call her dreadful, Lady Juliet ?”

“In truth, I am wrong to do so, for she is high and holy, and near of kin to my father. But they say, Morgante, that she rules her con-

vent with an iron rod, and that the pope himself defers to her on any point of doubtful discipline. I believe Father Laurence loves to frighten me, by telling histories of her severity; but, indeed, if my father have so decided, I would rather die than live."

The affectionate boy looked ready to weep, but still he sought to persuade her, that it was possible her fears were groundless. "But wherefore do you think, my lord, your father, has taken this project into his head? Has he ever told you so, Lady Juliet?"

"Not absolutely—but he has often hinted at it—sometimes he says that—noble as is the house of Albano, the counting the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's among its offspring is still its proudest boast."

"Well!—let him say so still. Perhaps he is right, Signora. If all the commendatories, ammiraglios, and generalissimos of his illustrious family, were as insignificant as ——"

Juliet frowned, and Morgante hid his roguish face from her sight, by slipping behind the chair

of state prepared for the Abbess. In a moment, however, he resumed his gravity, and again approaching her, he said, "Were I lady Juliet, neither count nor abbess, neither aunt nor father, should make a nun of me, against my will."

"That is easily said, boy—but how am I to help it? It is evident to me that my father's mind ~~is~~ set upon it—no day passes now, without his talking of the glory of seeing another daughter of the house of Albano ready to follow——"

"Tush, Signora! Is that all? Why, I have seen him point to the gigantic armour in the hall, and tell your little brother, who, God help him, is hardly stouter than myself, that he hoped some day to see him rival in renown, and in size too, I suppose, the prodigious ancestor to whom that suit belonged. Surely a little strutting from my lord the Count need not alarm you."

"But Father Laurence too is always hinting the same thing, and as for Olive, since this visit has been talked of, she seems perfectly bewitched. If I speak of a robe, she will answer, that Father Laurence is a holy man—if I ask for my lute,

she brings me my beads; and half the hours she used to spend in embroidery, she now passes in the chapel. I wish they would make a nun of her, Morgante, and set me to watch the goats that browse before her father's cottage."

"And yet, Signora," replied the young urchin, "I much doubt if the zittella be exactly the stuff of which holy church would choose her nuns."

While this conversation proceeded, the eye of Juliet returned, from time to time, to the little vessel before mentioned, which was evidently drawing nearer to the coast. "Your eyes are keener than all others, Morgante; can you make out the colours of yonder small ensign, which flutters from the mast-head of that little sloop?"

The page gave half a glance of his bright eye at the lady's cheek, and then, with half a smile, looked in the direction she pointed. "The breeze is too busy with it, Signora; were it still for an instant, I think I could tell. But stay a moment—I will run to the point, and soon bring

you as much news as the stains on that ribbon can tell."

The next moment she saw his little figure bounding lightly down the steps of the terrace, then away through a small postern in the outer wall of the garden, and again, after the interval of a few minutes, climbing, with the activity of a squirrel, the steep bank which rose on the other side of the stream, and which he had gained by a little bridge not visible from the window. For a few minutes more, she watched him darting in and out through the trees, till, at last, she lost sight of him entirely amidst the shrubby labyrinth of the receding bank. She still continued, however, to gaze earnestly from the window, and so completely was her attention fixed upon the little vessel, which, tacking up against the wind, teased her, by sometimes appearing to approach, and sometimes to retreat, that the door of the room was opened and shut behind her without her being at all aware of the circumstance. But the Count d'Albano must not be introduced at the end of a chapter.

CHAPTER II.

Pride is his own glass, his own trumpet, his own chronicle.

SHAKSPEARE.

THE Count d'Albano was, as he daily, nay, almost hourly boasted, the representative of a long-descended race of Italian nobles. His most remarkable quality, even in his own opinion, was being his father's son. Never did any man rest more securely upon the merits of others than did this present Theodore, seventh Count d'Albano. All that had ever been well done in field, or well said in council, by his ancestors, was just so much individual merit in himself. His small, regular, insipid features, though they spoke little else, were

not deficient in the power of expressing a feeling that might rather be termed self-adulation than pride, or of conveying, with little danger of being mistaken, abundant contempt of nearly all the world beside.

Though his life had passed without his doing one single act for the love of virtue, yet as he professed, and believed himself to be, one of the most religious men living, his conscience gave him but little trouble. For this there were two reasons: the first arose from an unceasing indestructible persuasion, that whatever he did, and whatever he said, was infinitely better than what any other mortal could have done or said under the same circumstances; the second was furnished by a saving faith in the unlimited power of absolution. His affections were not sufficiently strong to occasion him any uneasiness, and his life had hitherto passed with little other anxiety than what arose from the fear of not being able to take enough care of himself—to do himself enough honour—and of not teaching all the world to be enough aware that Theodore

Count d'Albano was the most dignified little nobleman alive.

There was, - however, one circumstance to which he was rather fond of alluding, as a great and terrible misfortune to his race, and yet he contrived to derive individual merit and glory, even from this.

His mother was an English woman; a daughter of the noble house of Arlborough. So far all was well; and the emblazoned genealogy shone more proudly from the addition of so splendid a bearing; but she was a Protestant. This circumstance was perfectly well known at the time his father married her; for her family were among the most faithful personal friends of the unfortunate queen, Anne Boleyn; and they had never, even during the reign of Mary, compromised the integrity of their faith. But there were many reasons to induce the young Italian to overlook this objection. The lady was young, beautiful, and wealthy; and moreover he considered the business of her conversion as too easy, and too certain, to leave the slightest

scruple upon his mind. Whatever were the means used to effect this conversion, they failed ; and it was known, beyond the possibility of concealment, that the present Count, as well as his illustrious sister, had a heretic mother.

What effect this inveterate heresy produced on her daughter will be seen hereafter ; to her son it furnished an additional opportunity of displaying his Catholic zeal. He sought every occasion to proclaim his execration of her memory, and had a monthly mass performed in the chapel of the castle, to cleanse the soul of his father of the especial sin of having married her.

Though in general his character was made up of seemings, his superstition was genuine ; education, habit, and weak nerves had all conspired to make it so, and the only feeling which his pompous phraseology could not exaggerate, was the satisfaction he felt in his near relationship to the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's. It had been reported in many circles at Rome, that Pope Pius the Fifth had been heard to say, that if the remainder of Geraldine d'Albano's life were

passed in the same manner as the years she had already numbered, her name ought to be added to the calendar of blessed saints. This had been reported to the Count, and from the moment he heard it, he had ceased not to importune the holy lady to honour the castle d'Albano with her presence.

It was a pleasant and easy voyage from Ancona to Torre Vecchia, and it appeared strange to many, that the invitation had never yet been accepted; but now, to the inexpressible delight of her brother, she had announced her intention of revisiting the place of her birth, and passing four days with him and his children.

The Count now entered his daughter's apartment accompanied by an ecclesiastic, who filled the situations of tutor to his son, officiating priest at the daily offices performed in the chapel, and confessor to the household. Father Laurence was a man who, living in any age, or in any country, belonging to any profession, or pursuing almost any line of conduct, would be designated (allowing for the variations of ver-

naacular idiom) “a good-hearted man at the bottom.” There is no praise, perhaps, so lightly accorded as this; it is often bestowed on men guilty of notorious vices, and utterly devoid of principle. The secret of this strange approbation of evil lies in the unstinted toleration with which such characters behold the faults of others. A good-hearted man at the bottom will give his hand in amity to the living representative of almost any crime or weakness that can disgrace humanity. He will “poor fellow” the desperate gamester; “good fellow” the desperate drunkard; and “fine fellow” the desperate libertine; in return for all which good-heartedness, he expects to receive (and is rarely disappointed) plenary indulgence for all his own irregularities of every description whatever.

Such a man was Daniello Rossi, and no one had ever found good-heartedness at the bottom answer better. A fine base voice, with some talent for music, assisted to procure him popularity, and wherever he appeared, he was perhaps more welcome than many a better man might have been.

At the age of thirty-five he gladly exchanged the tedium and restraint of the cloister for a snug residence in the castle of Albano, and for twenty years Father Laurence had contrived to sustain the reputation of a good and pious man, with nearly every member of the household. He was indeed a confessor whom few establishments would be likely to quarrel with; he wore his religion as easily as his embroidered cope, and was much too good-hearted to torment his penitents by any undue severity.

With his patron he was an especial favourite; not having the slightest partiality for any opinions of his own, he the more readily adopted, admired, and lauded, all such as were uttered by the Count; and as he contrived, under pretence of official occupation, private devotion, or attending to his duties as tutor, to escape the intolerable bore of his pompous conversation during by far the greater portion of the day, he led as easy and happy a life, as ever fell to the lot of a monk.

“Can you find nothing, Lady Juliet,” said

her father, as he approached her, "Can you find nothing within the compass of your youthful powers, and not inconsistent with the dignity of my daughter, by which you could testify your sense of the honour that awaits you?"

"What honour, sir," said the young lady, trembling as she spoke, and with her head too full of what she feared, to believe that her father could address her on any other subject.

"How is this, child? You ask what honour? when the whole castle is in movement to prepare for the reception of the holiest abbess, and the noblest lady that Italy can boast of; and you ask—what honour!"

"The Lady Juliet meant, my lord——" began the confessor.

"Is it to the physician that I must speak?" resumed the Count, without paying the least attention to him: "Has some death-like torpor crept over you; or must I tell your confessor here, to examine into the state of your soul?"

"Neither, dear father, neither," said the poor girl; "I knew not you were speaking of my aunt."

“What else can I speak of, Lady Juliet? If this event does not occupy your thoughts, young lady, I believe you are the only person on my domain, who can say as much.”

The angry Count raised his well-pencilled, and coal-black eyebrows, into sharp elliptical arches on his smooth low forehead, as he spoke. This was a certain sign of wrath.

“Indeed, my dear father, I too am occupied by the same subject—but just as you entered—”

“Well, well, Juliet—say no more—this is no moment for me to doubt your proper feelings. The time draws near, my love, when all my proudest hopes for you are about to be fulfilled.”

Juliet said nothing, but she raised her young eyes, with fearful anxiety, to the face of her father.

He turned away for a moment, and then added—“Ask me no questions, Juliet. My noble sister shall herself explain the honour which is in store for you.”

He waited not for any reply, but stalked out of the room with a majestic step, whose echo

whispered to his heart as he went, "I am the Count d'Albano." Father Laurence followed him out, as he had followed him in, with a whimsical expression of weariness on his countenance; having been obliged to attend upon him almost constantly for the last two days, in order to assist in inspecting again, and again, and again, the metamorphosis of different parts of the castle, which were deemed necessary by the Count, in order to receive properly the illustrious visiter he expected.

The pretty creature they left, more and more confirmed in her fears by every word her father addressed to her, felt almost in despair, and exclaimed aloud, "What will become of me! Who is there that can help me!"

"Green and silver," cried the page, who entered at this moment, out of breath with the speed he had used to execute her commission; "green and silver are plainly to be seen on the little streamer that——"

But before he had finished the sentence the Count re-entered. Fortunately his attention was

entirely directed to Morgante, or he must have perceived the deep blush and agitated air which these words had produced on his daughter's countenance.

The fact was, that the boy, in his eager haste, had brushed past the Count in his way to the parlour, with less reverence than the great man deemed necessary; who feeling, moreover, some curiosity to learn the cause of this vehement hurry, turned round, both to chide, and to question him. The motions of the boy, however, were too rapid for him, and Morgante, unconscious that he was followed, had entered the room, and uttered the important words before he was overtaken.

“How now, sir? What does all this mean?” exclaimed the offended nobleman, with a tremendous frown. “Are you aware, sir, who it was you met in the hall but now?”

“Your eccellenza and Father Laurence,” answered the boy composedly.

“How, boy?—You knew it was me, and yet you did not stand aside? What was your

business, sir? What was the occasion of haste, so utterly indecent in its consequences?"

Juliet hardly breathed; but she had no reason for alarm.

"I humbly crave your eccellenza's pardon," replied Morgante, "but I love to run, greatly better than to walk, and knew not that your eccellenza and the holy father objected to it. I will do penance for it, my lord, before I sleep."

The boy hung his head, and affected to look so terrified, that the Count was immediately softened, and said solemnly, "Not for running, boy, not for the mere act of running, but for having forgotten to pay due observance to your sovereign lord."

"Shall I seek Father Laurence now, my lord, to make my confession?"

"No, no, not at present—the Father is waiting for me in the hall, to proceed with the important business we are upon."

But here his eccellenza was mistaken, as Father Laurence had gladly seized upon the opportunity to escape; on returning to the hall,

and finding he was gone, the Count again entered his daughter's room, and solely because he did not know at that particular moment, how else to talk of the Abbess, and the glory of receiving her, he again addressed himself to the little page.

“Remember, sir page, we must have no fooleries now. Father Laurence, though ever too ready to assoil your misdemeanours, will not fail to punish them with a heavy hand, if practised near the presence of the most reverend Abbess of Sant' Catherina's—so look to it, boy—do you hear? and see that your behaviour is befitting this great occasion.”

Morgante listened with the air of a little monk receiving orders from his superior; but before the Count's speech was well finished, he seized upon a splendid rosary of fretted gold which lay upon the table, and began in a loud voice gabbling over aves, pater nosters, and credos, with the rapidity of a magpie in full chatter.

Juliet turned away her head, for, despite her anxiety, she could not resist her inclination

to smile. The solemn Count hardly knew how to look: he had never been known to smile at any jest that was not uttered by some one decidedly his superior in rank, and to scold the boy for saying a credo, appeared hardly warrantable. After looking puzzled for a minute or two, he turned to depart, saying, "So so,—that will do, sir. Lay down that string of golden beads, and tell your prayers by one more fitting to your station."

CHAPTER III.

God and our innocency, defend and guard us!

SHAKSPEARE.

THOUGH the Count was upon the occasion above-mentioned, as well as upon many others, perfectly unconscious of the playful roguery the page played off upon him, there was something in the boy's manner that grated against his nobility. In truth, neither the sharp wit, nor the bold bearing of Morgante, were at all calculated to win favour from the Count d'Albano, for both were often shown in a manner to make it doubted whether the urchin felt all the reverence, admiration, fear, and devotion, which was his undoubted due. So little, indeed, was he beloved by the lord

of the castle, that it is likely Lady Juliet's partial fondness for the poor child would not have ensured his continuance in the family, had not the manner of his introduction into it been such as to forbid his dismissal. The circumstances which attended this singular introduction were as follow.

About twelve years before the period of which we are speaking, the Count d'Albano, having acknowledged at confession some fault graver than usual, was enjoined by his confessor, Father Laurence, a penance more remarkable for its solemnity than for any thing of mortification or suffering attached to it. The Count was enjoined to pass the first hour after midnight alone, and in the attitude of prayer, on the steps of the high altar in the chapel of the castle. The building was splendidly illuminated for the occasion, and to prevent the feeling of the noble penitent from becoming too severely impressed by the awful solitude around him, the confessor himself, attended by the maggiordomo, was stationed in the little sacristy, adjoining the

chapel; but scarcely had they arranged themselves in the snug seats with which the apartment was provided, when they heard a loud cry from the steps of the altar. They both rushed towards the Count, who was kneeling on the highest step, with his eyes earnestly bent upon some object lying immediately before him, within the rail. The trembling penitent started to his feet, and catching the arm of the priest, exclaimed, "It lives, and moves! Father, in the name of all the saints in heaven, I conjure thee to tell me what this means!"

Father Laurence threw a supporting arm round his patron, while he ordered the servant to examine what it was, which had so greatly startled his master. No sooner had the man touched the white linen cloth, which enveloped the object of their curiosity, than the faint cry of a new-born infant was distinctly heard.

"Holy mother!" exclaimed the maggiordomo, lifting the child in his arms, and displaying it before the eyes of the Count and his confessor,

“This is a god-send, to reward the piety of his eccellenza.”

“What can this mean, Father?” reiterated the still trembling nobleman:—“how could this infant come here?”

As he spoke, Father Laurence disengaged a small scrap of parchment that was fastened to the linen in which the infant was swathed, and by the light of the candles which burned upon the altar, he read the words—

DONUM DEI.

and then answered solemnly:—

“Whether by the direct act of God, or only by his will permitting the act of another, this infant has been sent to you in a manner which must command your protection and care through life. Fulfil this duty, my son, as you hope for prosperity in this life, and salvation in the next; and for this duty let your present penance be exchanged.”

“I agree to it, holy Father,” replied the Count,

well pleased to be excused from remaining any longer on the solemn spot.

“But what mean the words you have read?”
“These words,” replied the Father, “being interpreted, signify,

THE GIFT OF GOD.”

“So be it,” said the Count, directing his steps towards the sacristy. “Paulo, give the babe immediately into the hands of Dame Marietta, and charge her to be mindful of it.”

This gift of God was no other than our tiny Morgante; the Count himself certainly never felt any particular partiality for the little foundling; it was long ere he lost the sort of shy consciousness with which he recalled the fright his first appearance had caused him; but, fortunately, he was the pet of every one else in the castle. Even Father Laurence was often seen caressing the little Diodono, for such was the name by which he had been baptized, though the Lady Juliet had called him in sport “Morgante Maggiore,” which sobriquet had been so generally

adopted, that the boy himself had totally forgotten his real name.

It will be easily believed that a child so introduced into the family of a most rigid Catholic in the sixteenth century, was in no danger of being lightly dismissed; but he was in truth the sauciest imp alive (excepting when his affectionate little heart taught him deference), and, certainly, nothing less imperative than the circumstances above stated could have prevented his being whipped off the domain, long before the period at which our story commences.

There was, too, another reason which prevented the indignation of the Count from showing itself by any overt act of severity towards his daughter's page; this was the decided protection and indulgence which all his peccadillos met with from good Father Laurence. The Count d'Albano was much too good a Catholic to persecute a favourite of his spiritual director, and thus it happened that the little Morgante became a chartered libertine, and generally dared

to act and speak with more freedom than any other inhabitant of the castle.

This digression has been so long, that it may be feared the reader has forgotten that the Count had just concluded a lecture, and was on the point of leaving his daughter's parlour when we began it.

No sooner had he closed the door, than Morgante replaced the rosary on the table, and laying aside his roguery at the same time, knelt down upon the little stool on which Juliet rested her foot, and looking up in her face, remained silently waiting for her to question him.

“Green and silver, Morgante? are you quite sure, boy?”

“As sure as that I see you now, dear mistress; the vessel bore close under the watchtower headland, and I have seen that pretty bark before, dear lady.”

“Say you so, my page?” replied Juliet, while her soft cheek dimpled, and her eyes sparkled with the brightness of some inward thought, “then thy day's work is not done, Morgante—

you must have another race through the thicket, and——”

“ And about, and about, and about,” interrupted the page, springing on his feet, “ till I get to the large chesnut tree, that stretches his long arms over the pool—just where the mountain stream, you know, stops a moment to take a last look at its own green banks, before it leaves them for ever, to plunge into the sea.—Well, lady, I am ready.”

“ But I must write, Morgante.—Hush ! that is Olive’s voice.—Now, try your wit in keeping her engaged, while I am in my closet. Yes, I must write,” continued Juliet, thoughtfully.

“ I guessed as much,” said the boy, with a saucy smile, “ and I must carry it: well, you shall have good time. If Olive were as slippery as an eel, I would hold her fast.”

The waiting-woman entered at this moment, holding in her hand a small basin, made of the finest amber.

“ What do you with that, Olive ?” said the

young lady, stretching out her hand, and attempting to take it from her.

“ You know I hold that basin sacred, it was my mother’s.”

“ Yes, Signora,” answered the waiting-maid, withdrawing the hand which held it, “ and Father Laurence says it is just the fit sort of thing to be sacred ; it is by his desire, Signora, that I have brought it hither, to hold holy water for the Abbess. See how well it looks on the beautiful gold cloth ; and the beads must lie just careless beside it,—like that.”

Olive occupied herself while speaking, in newly arranging the articles upon the table, according to her fancy.

Juliet looked vexed, but only said—

“ Well, well, Olive, be it as you and the father confessor please. I shall not care to sit in this parlour now, it looks no longer mine. You may do what you will with it. I will go to my own room—my embroidery, my books, my cithern—I suppose I shall find them all there ?”

“ Yes, sure, Signora, they have all been moved

very carefully ; Father Laurence carried the embroidery himself."

" Since I have been so completely turned out here," said Juliet, " I do hope I shall be permitted to remain uninterrupted in my own apartment ; I desire, Olive, that no more of your bustling preparations may reach me there—let me be quiet in one room, at least."

" Dear me, Signora, what a pity it is that you take things in that way ; I am sure Father Laurence, kind, good man, would not have fixed upon this room for the world, if he had thought it would vex you so."

" Father Laurence ? Was it not done by my father's orders ?"

" Oh dear, yes, certainly ; but it was Father Laurence that found out how well every thing would look here ; and, you know, Signora, that his eccellenza is the best of Catholics, and very seldom contradicts what the confessor says."

" And that is, doubtless, the reason," said Morgante, " why Mistress Olive never refuses the confessor any thing he asks ?"

The waiting-maid turned quickly round upon him, very much as if she purposed to give him a cuff.

“Hands off, pretty Olive!” said the boy, springing lightly upon the broad stone window frame; and placing his diminutive person in the open casement, he held by the mullions, while he swayed himself backwards and forwards, still continuing his conversation with her, while Juliet quietly left the room.

“Shall I tell you, Olive, what I heard Barnando say yesterday about your eyes?”

“Out upon you, foolish ape,” replied the girl; “what do you know about eyes?”

“Nay, but listen to me,” said the page; “listen to me, Olive, and you shall hear something that will surprise you.”

Olive, though still pretending to look very cross, continued to occupy herself in doing nothing, about the chair, and the table, and the footstool, while Morgaute went on with a rhodomontade account of the admiration expressed by various serving-men of her beauty and

graces—all invented for the nonce, but perfectly answering the purpose for which it was intended,—keeping Olive completely spell-bound.

In the year 1575, the hour at which the great bell rang for dinner in the castle of an Italian nobleman was precisely twelve—not mid-night, but mid-day; and on the day whose history we are relating, this bell found Juliet shut into her closet, her fair fingers busily engaged in tracing words which seemed to move her heart as she wrote them. She started at the sound, and hastily ceasing her occupation, twisted a thread of silver mixed with green around a letter which she folded carefully, and had just concealed it in her bosom, when Morgante entered, followed by Olive, to hasten her to the hall.

The impatient Count growled forth a sullen inquiry as to “what had detained her?”

“My lady was preparing for the Lady Abbess, my lord,” said the saucy page; “my lady’s parrot too has been practising all day. I have been teaching him to say, Ave!”

This was spoken as he followed Juliet through the hall, to take her station at the upper end of it; the Count frowning all the time portentously, while the confessor, who was there, as usual, to bless the meat, hid the smile, which he rarely refused to the flippancies of Morgante, behind his cap.

Juliet looked very pale, and hurried forward with a faltering step. Before she reached her place, a boy, as beautiful as poets fancy Love, sprang from the table, where he was already seated, and fondly took her hand.

“Dear sister!” said he, “what is it, Juliet, that makes you look so pale?”

“Nothing, Ferdinand, nothing; I have been reading a sad tale.”

And she said true, though she might have added, that she had been writing it too.

As she reached the table, the blessing was first spoken by Father Laurence, and then repeated from the bottom of the room by four powerful voices among the household, accompanied by a flourish of wind instruments.

The repast was ample, though not exactly such as might satisfy a noble appetite of modern days. The proud Count permitted no one, except the confessor, to eat with him and his children, though many in the rank of gentry dined daily at his cost, but it was at a table placed at the lower part of the hall. The pomp, the ceremony, the pageantry of eating, were all of first-rate dignity, and as this was not only dearer to the Count than the food he ate, but also than the air he breathed, he swelled as the grace was chaunted, and looked fully appeased as he took his place under the canopy that was suspended over his chair. Morgante stationed himself, as usual, behind his lady, and excepting that when he affected to bend forward to receive her orders, he contrived to whisper some saucy sally in her ear, the meal passed in silence. At length the Count spoke as follows:—

“In general, it is not my wish, as you well know, Lady Juliet, that any symptom of haste or carelessness of any kind, should appear at the hours of refection; nevertheless, on this occa-

sion, I am compelled to hint to you, that my people have need of this apartment. Your ladyship cannot suppose, that the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's is to take her repasts (if indeed she condescends to take them in public) seated on an humble bench, as you are now. Neither would it be fitting that the coronet which surmounts my own chair, should be seen above her head. It is, therefore, desirable, nay, altogether necessary that preparation be made, and the earlier we quit the hall the better."

"I am perfectly ready, my lord," said Lady Juliet rising, "and only wait for the grace."

"If you are ready," whispered Morgante, "it is more than the reverend Father is. Holy mother ! how he shovels in the viands !"

At length the grace was said and sung ; the lordly Count strutted forth, followed by his son and daughter, while the confessor tarried for a second behind, to drain one cup, before dishes, flagons, tables, and stools were all rattling together under the hands of the jealous menials. While they contended together, as to which could show

the most devotion in turning chairs into thrones, and ordinary curtains into stately draperies, Lady Juliet, followed by her light-footed page, stole quietly to her chamber.

CHAPTER IV.

Love's heralds should be thoughts.

SHAKSPEARE.

“Now, Morgante, now is the time. Even Olive will have no eyes to watch you now—take this,” continued Juliet, drawing the letter from her bosom. “Go quickly to the chesnut tree, and ——.”

“And if a handsome youth, with light blue eye, and curls of gold, should chance to linger there?”

“Then give him this from me.”

“And that is all? You expect not to receive any thing in return?”

“Oh, but I do!—and that you know, Mor-

gante: now fly—be quick—be cautious. You shall find me on the terrace.”

No lady ever had a fleeter messenger, and yet her thoughts outstripped his speed.

“ Why does he not return?——He has been watched, and the letter taken from him!——He has not met him, but lingers still in hope he may arrive.”

It was thus the impatient young lady tormented herself, by conjuring up every possible species of mischance that could have befallen the boy. At last, and in as short a time as anything without wings could have done her errand, Morgante appeared before her; but unfortunately the whole length of the terrace was between them—she dared not run, for Father Laurence was eating figs at fifty yards’ distance, in the garden below—and, perhaps for the same reason, the boy thought it necessary to be equally deliberate in his movements, so that she had still some tantalizing moments to endure. The distance however diminished, though by slow degrees, and they were already near enough

for her to perceive the corner of a paper, which the well-pleased urchin permitted at that moment to peep out above his sash, when the voice of Olive was heard at a few paces behind her.

“His eccellenza wants you directly, Signora.”

“Tell him I will obey instantly,” said the young lady.

“You had better come *now*, Signora,—his eccellenza seems rather troubled in temper—I believe he is vexed because he can bethink him of no more preparations to make.”

“I will be with him immediately, Olive—pray go and tell him so.”

“Don’t you know, Signora, how my lord will look, if I go back and say—‘The lady Juliet is coming.’”

“Not if you say ‘*directly*’—I must gather these lilies first—they will droop before night, and I particularly want them to place before the picture of the virgin in my aunt’s closet.”

“You go to your father, Signora, and I will gather the lilies. Here comes Morgante, and he shall carry them for me.”

Poor Juliet!—the thing was impossible, and giving one disconsolate glance to her page, she obeyed the unwelcome summons.

Olive had very acutely interpreted the state of the Count's mind. He had just witnessed the completion of the last preparation that his genius could invent, and having endured for two minutes and a half the fretful vacuity that followed, it happily occurred to him that he might parade his son and daughter round the castle, on pretence of seeing that nothing had been forgotten.

When she reached the parlour her father was sitting with his head turned towards the door, and much impatience in his manner. Father Laurence, who had just entered, was standing on one side of him, and little Ferdinand on the other.

“I have sent for you, Lady Juliet, to inquire if you have yet gone through the castle, with a view of ascertaining if all things are in the order they ought to be?”

“I think, sir, I have seen every room.”

“You think so, Lady Juliet? Let me tell you, young lady, that you must do more than

think in such an hour as this ; Albano's daughter must *know* that her duties have been performed."

" Shall I go now, Signor Padre, to examine the apartments?"

" Assuredly. It ought to have been thought of earlier ; but happily there is yet time."

Juliet was almost out of the room before the pompous " Stay, lady !" could reach her.

" Stay, lady," said the Count, " we will accompany you."

He rose from his chair, and presented her his arm. She sighed away the hope of a moment, and took it. Father Laurence yawned, but prepared to follow, and little Ferdinand, taking his hand, dragged himself languidly along beside him, this being the third time that day, that he had been made to accompany his father and the confessor on a solemn circuit of inquiry round the castle.

The progress began ; the Count praised, and harangued himself into perfect good humour, but poor Juliet only suffered the more severely ; the better pleased he was himself, the more

incessantly he called upon her for approbation, and while her spirit was vexed, her thoughts absent, and her heart aching, she had to feign a lively interest about things utterly indifferent or disagreeable.

Ere they had proceeded far, Morgante joined the party, and without ceremony took his station, with an air of official dignity, behind his lady. The *rôgûe* well knew, that whatever had the appearance of respect and observance, was sure to find favour with the Count.

The manœuvre, however, was quite thrown away, no possibility of delivering the letter occurred, during the long hour devoted to this wearisome procession, and when it was over, the Count took it into his head that it would be proper for Lady Juliet to confess, and receive absolution from her confessor, before being introduced to her holy relative.

It required the exertion of all the little innocent finesse with which women are blessed (particularly in Italy), to conceal the repugnance she felt to complying with this proposal.

“I always prepare for confession, my lord—to-morrow morning I will be ready to see Father Laurence.”

“To-morrow! If my zealous prayers are heard, and I have some reason to flatter myself that my prayers are not likely to be wholly disregarded, the vessel that bears the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s will be seen off our coast at an early hour to-morrow—no preparation must be remitted till to-morrow. Holy Father,—attend the Lady Juliet to her chamber forthwith. I trust you will find her mind in a proper state for the important events that are about to befall her.”

The confessor, who had not at all more inclination for the business than the penitent, and who, for the last twenty minutes, had been comforting himself by the idea, that as soon as this most detestable parade was over, he should enjoy a little snug refreshment in his own room, looked at Juliet, in the hope that her quick wit would yet be able to devise some escape,—and most truly did he grieve to observe that her eyes were full of tears, and her whole countenance too elo-

quently expressive of dejection, to afford him the least hope of getting off by her means. He, therefore screwed his courage to the necessary point, and prepared to follow her.

To do Father Laurence justice, he was rarely very cross; indeed, he studied so unremittingly to keep himself in good humour by all the little indulgences within his reach, that it was not very often the demon of ill temper could find an opportunity to beset him; but now, his good-heartedness was ebbing fast, and by the time he reached Juliet's door, he felt well-disposed to inflict whatever penance he thought would plague her most,—for, as he reasonably enough said to himself, “if she had had the wit of a kitchen wench, she would have got off.”

Lady Juliet entered her room; Father Laurence following, and closing the door with no gentle hand, seated himself, and said, “Well, daughter! Begin.”

“I am in no fit temper to confess, holy Father, I am out of humour with myself, and all the world.”

“Waste not the precious time, my daughter,” said the confessor sullenly. “Think who it is who comes to-morrow ! Beware !”

The patience of an Italian girl cannot last for ever,—that of Juliet had already been severely tried, and now with more warmth than prudence she exclaimed—

“Peace, peace, good Father, on that worn-out theme. I sicken at the name of this prodigious aunt !”

This was a very favourable occasion for the ill humour of Father Laurence to exhale itself—

“Unhappy girl !” he exclaimed, with an air of affected compassion, “You know not what you say. But I can tell you, Lady Juliet, you may live to look back with regret on the gentle rule of a confessor before whom you could venture to speak such words. You sicken at the name of your aunt ? You sicken at the name of her, before whom mitred abbots bow ?——of her, whose blood-relation to yourself is so soon to be merged and swallowed up in one ten thousand times more

near and holy—that of your superior, Lady Juliet !”

Poor Juliet was at that moment ill prepared to receive this full confirmation of all she most dreaded. She turned deadly pale, and the terrified monk, who had repented his premature declaration the instant he uttered it, thought that he had very likely killed outright the embryo promise of a second abbess of the house of Albano. He raised the half fainting girl in his arms, laid her on the bed, and bustled out of the room, to look for some one who understood “fits” better than he did.

On opening the door he perceived Morgante hovering about the passage that led to it.

“Morgante, boy, run for Olive—run for your life, dear boy—Lady Juliet is in a fit. Yet stay, I think you had better go in, and find some of her essences to throw on her—and I will go and seek Olive myself.”

The boy waited for no second bidding, but flew to her room, and the instant he entered it, closed and bolted the door.

“Dear mistress ! sweet lady !” he exclaimed, as he took hold of her hand—“Look up ! open your eyes, and see what I have brought for you.”

It appeared that the faintness had suddenly passed away, for Lady Juliet immediately obeyed the voice of her little messenger, and the next moment held the dear letter she had so ardently longed for between her fingers. The mere possession of it seemed to cure all her sorrows, but she was obliged immediately to conceal it, unread, within the folds of her dress, for steps were heard rapidly approaching.

Morgante, now become the most meek and quiet-looking page in the world, hastened to open the door, and Father Laurence re-entered accompanied by Olive.

Juliet felt that it was necessary to disguise in some degree the perfect cure that had been wrought in the absence of the confessor. It was easy enough to lie with her eyes shut, but less so, to check the smile which she felt treacherously playing round her lips as she pressed to her

bosom the bit of magical paper which the page had given her.

It is true she knew not what it contained—it might be cold sincerity—it might be impassioned falsehood—or ungenerous boldness; but none of these dreadful possibilities occurred to Juliet. There is something so beautifully confiding in the natural feeling of a woman's heart, that she will never doubt till she has been taught to do so. But with all this gladness in her bosom, it was necessary that she should seem both sick and sorrowful.

“Let me be quiet—and alone, Olive. Holy Father, will you excuse my confession for this evening?”

“Surely, my dear daughter, and grant you withal, full absolution. So rest quietly, dear child.—Come, Olive—Lady Juliet must be left alone.”

“Let Morgante sit by me,” said the young lady faintly.

“He shall, he shall, my child.—Do you hear, boy? Sit down quietly on that stool, make no

noise whatever—nor stir a step for your life. Perhaps the Lady Juliet may sleep for an hour ; nothing will so well restore her.”

At length they departed — and again the ready page sprang to the door and bolted it, in order, as he said, “to obey thy holy Father, and keep all quiet.”

The precious paper was then drawn forth from her bosom, it ran thus :—

“ Once more, my love, I am here, and hoped it would have been yourself should greet me under the well-known tree. What is this piteous tale Morgante brings me ? That they would make a nun of thee, my Juliet ?—Fear it not, dear one—that shall never be. Geraldine d’Albano, then—your aunt, I mean—comes here to-morrow. This will not prevent our meeting, my sweet Juliet. Fear nothing—but that we should ever cease to love. Let your page meet me again to-night, to name the hour to-morrow, at which I may expect you ; postpone not our meeting an hour beyond what is

needful for your safety. Alas! I have no time to tarry—the vessel which brought me from Trieste waits for me. Whatever be the hour, the place must be the same. This dear tree, where now I write, is sacred, Juliet. Farewell, sweet love, till to-morrow.”

Juliet kissed the paper, and replaced it in her bosom.

“Think you, Morgante,” said she, “that you can go again to-night?”

“To-night?—This moment, lady—what shall I say to him?”

“This moment!—And what shall I answer, if they ask why you have left me?”

“Is it possible, so ill as you are, Signora, that you do not wish for some wild flowers to refresh you? Have you forgotten how beautiful the pale roses are, which grow under the olives yonder?”

“That is very true,” said Juliet smiling.—“Then go, Morgante; tell him that to-morrow evening, when all are at vespers——.”

“ Now go to sleep, Signora,” said the boy as he left the room. “ Nothing will so well restore you,” he added, in Father Laurence’s own coaxing whine—“ I will be back in time to wake you.”

Lady Juliet did not sleep, but went down at the usual hour to join the family at supper in the hall, for she feared nothing more than being accounted ill, which always enforced confinement to her room. Soon after she had taken her place, Morgante entered gaily from his ramble ; one quick glance of his eye, one slight movement of his childish head, told her that all was right. With this assurance she felt perfectly satisfied, and despite all her sorrows, retired to rest in no unhappy frame of mind. For one soft hour of lover’s watchfulness, she lay looking at the moon-beams as they fell in showers of broken light among the boughs that danced before her window, thinking of the morrow and the greenwood-tree, till her reverie melted into a dream, and then she slept soundly till the morning.

CHAPTER V.

“ Beautiful spirit!——

—in whose form

The charms of earth's least mortal daughters grow.—

Beautiful spirit! in thy calm clear brow,

Wherein is glossed serenity of soul,

Which of itself shows immortality.”

BYRON.

THE convent dedicated to Santa Catherina, of Siena, of which Geraldine d'Albano was Abbess, was situated at the distance of two miles from Ancona: it was at this place she was to embark on board a vessel, whose chief employment was to supply her convent, and, also, a monastery of monks of the same order at Ancona, with all that Europe could furnish. With a crew, almost as Catholic as if the vessel had been manned by

the monks themselves, and with a gentle steady breeze from the south, the holy party feared not to trust themselves on board.

The Abbess of Sant' Catherina's was thought to love parade, and it must be confessed that she gave some reason for the supposition, as she never moved without a retinue that might have contented a princess. She had not thought it necessary on the present occasion to retrench her state ; for she knew the ample dimensions of the castle of her ancestors, and also, that whatever inconvenience her train might occasion, her brother would rather endure it, than abate one jot of dignity.

In that age the roads of Italy could not be traversed safely, without an armed escort ; and it was by the express command of the Pope himself, that twenty stout men-at-arms were stationed at Ancona, to be ever in readiness to attend this distinguished Abbess when she journeyed, whether in holy pilgrimage to some honoured shrine, or on affairs of worldly necessity. Though a short voyage on the Adriatic

was not likely to put their valour to the proof, this guard still attended her. Four nuns of her convent, whose office, had the lady been royal, would have been that of maids of honour, a secretary, an almoner, her confessor, and her steward, together with about a dozen menials, completed her train. There were, also, mules of perfect manage and gentleness for herself, her ladies, and the attendant priests, together with twenty stout horses for her guard, and active beasts for the rest of her followers, in case, during her absence from the convent, she should have occasion to journey by land.

The morning rose with all the glow of Italian brightness. At an early hour the Count d'Albano was seen anxiously watching the direction in which the light boughs of the acacia bent their flowery tips. The wind was still favourable, and, therefore, according to the calculations made by the sailors of Torre Vecchia, the holy train might be expected to arrive before noon. A mass for their safety had been performed in the chapel of the castle every six hours since

the time fixed for their departure from Ancona, and the Count now commanded Father Laurence to perform the office (as they hoped for the last time on this occasion), somewhat earlier than the stated hour ; that, this last duty of preparation being performed, the whole population of the domain might set forth to meet the honoured visitor.

The Count directed his daughter to station herself on the steps of the great gateway, attended by Olive and four other damsels of the castle, with instructions to descend before the Abbess alighted from her mule, and kneeling on the rushes, which were spread to receive her, thus humbly crave her blessing. He made her rehearse this ceremony three times, before he was satisfied that the attitude in which she placed herself was sufficiently respectful.

Having at length seen it performed to his content, he mounted his palfrey, with the young Ferdinand on one side, and his confessor on the other, all of them having their horses pompously set forth, and in this order they waited under

the beams of a burning sun, till Morgante, who was stationed on the heights to keep watch, should announce the approach of a vessel bearing a banner embroidered with the device of a ruby heart, the peculiar symbol of Sant' Catherina of Siena. Half the boys upon the estate were stationed at intervals between Morgante and the Count, that no moment might be lost in proclaiming the news. The distance to Torre Vecchia was about a mile, and the road to it was already lined by a multitude of devout persons, who were desirous of touching the robe, or receiving the blessing of the Abbess.

The Count's own followers, including not only every retainer, of whatever rank, within the castle (excepting those engaged in preparing the banquet), but every human being on his estate, who was not either too young or too old to walk, were ordered to place themselves at the entrance to his domain, and as soon as the holy cavalcade should come in sight, to throw themselves on their knees before it, remaining in that position as long as they could do so without

impeding its progress. When they found themselves obliged to quit this attitude, they were to rise and place themselves in the rear of the procession.

A shout, that ran along the telegraphic string of boys already mentioned, gave the expected signal; it was answered by another shout from the numerous body of attendants that filled the open space before the castle, and then all moved forward towards the stations appointed for them.

The Count d'Albano seemed to dilate as he sat stiffly erect in his crimson saddle—it was the proudest moment of his life; his very palfrey paced forward with unusual dignity, as it bore him along—the feathers in his cap waved proudly, and his cloak fell, as if conscious of the swelling heart beneath, into folds of statelier breadth than common. As he rode, he rehearsed to his heart the glory that was come upon him. She, to whom bishops and cardinals came in holy pilgrimage; she, whose future canonization the pope himself had predicted; she, whose conventual discipline had been the

theme of praise within the sacred conclave; this pride of Italy, this pillar of the church, this first among women, was his sister and his guest!

Poor Juliet, who was already wearied by the lectures, the rehearsals, and more than all, by the anxiety that preyed upon her spirits, seated herself languidly within the shelter of the hall, as soon as the party were out of sight, and soon almost forgot the weighty business of the hour, while thinking of one who, she well believed, was like herself counting the tedious moments that had yet to wear away before their meeting.

It is a comfort for the young and impassioned part of the earth's family, that neither father, aunt, nor Abigail, can read what is passing in the heart. It was in vain that Olive stood gazing at the pale countenance of her young mistress—that she tried to interpret the world of meaning that seemed settled in the dark lustre of her eye. She could make nothing of it. Perfectly convinced, however, that there was something passing in Lady Juliet's mind which she could not understand, she began to persecute her with

questions—perhaps as much for the purpose of punishing her reserve by teasing her, as in the hope of eliciting information.

“Is it not queer, Signora, when his eccellenza makes such a point that you should put on all your state, that your little pest of a page does not choose to show himself? It was of much use, forsooth, for me to embroider a sash for the urchin, if he is to be scampering over the hills, instead of showing off, in his proper place behind you. Where do you think he can be, Signora?”

“He was sent by my father to look out from the cliff.”

“Perhaps I knew that before you did, Signora, for it was Father Laurence’s thought the sending him. But I mean, where is he now, Signora? Have you sent him any where?”

“I have seen none of the boys return. They are probably amusing themselves by still watching the vessel.”

“‘*Themselves!*’ as if you thought, Signora, that proud little imp of a page would deign to amuse himself for a single moment with those

raganuffins ! He must be gone somewhere else—have you sent him anywhere, Signora ?”

“I wish, Olive, you would not fatigue me with questions. If you want the boy, you had better seek for him.”

“No, indeed, Signora,—I know my duty better, my lord Count ordered me to stand four steps behind you—the page was to stand three—Margaretta, Joanna, Jeresa, and Ursula, two and two together, just three steps behind me. We are all here ready to pop into our places in an instant, and I only wish the Abbess would arrive this moment, and find you without any page at all.”

Almost before she had ceased speaking, the little truant appeared.

“Sit down, Morgante,” said Lady Juliet, kindly, “you look flushed and tired. Did you see the ruby heart distinctly ?”

“Oh yes—and the holy ladies on the deck too—I saw them all—for I ran, after giving the signal, to the very verge of the rock that overhangs the town. They all look just alike, Signora:—but

I hope we are not going to have five lady abbesses at once.—What would become of my lord Count !”

Lady Juliet now rose, and descending the steps, she walked through the court-yard to the esplanade in front of it. The page and Olive followed her. The heat was intense, and neither from the forest of noble oaks which faced the castle, at the distance of three hundred yards, nor from the pastures that stretched round it to the right, did the slightest sound proceed. Birds and beasts had alike withdrawn from the fervour of the mid-day sun. Juliet and Olive stood within the shadow of the gateway, while Morgante stepped out upon the glowing gravel before it. After a moment, the boy exclaimed, “ There they are, Signora ! do you not hear them ?”

“ No, indeed, Morgante,” replied Juliet stepping forward, “ you do but fancy it.”

She listened, however, attentively, and presently caught a distant sound ; in a few minutes after, the cavalcade was so distinctly heard approaching, that she hastily retreated to the hall,

summoning the women and her page to be ready to place themselves immediately, according to the Count's instructions. It appeared to all, however, a long time before any further signal reached them. Juliet's heart beat quick, when at length the horses' hoofs seemed suddenly to reach the gravel of the esplanade.—In another moment she should see the being into whose power she was to be thrown for the rest of her life ~~—~~ if ——

Her meditations were here cut short; several of the Count's serving-men, out-stepping the cavalcade, rushed forward, and laying their hands upon the already wide open gates, evinced their zeal, by endeavouring to stretch them wider still.

The next moment there entered ten men-at-arms, mounted on their powerful chargers, who ranged themselves on each side of the court; next came the four priests, who rode up to the steps, and took their stations two on either side. The holy ladies followed, and then the rest of the attendants.

Juliet's eyes were rivetted on the female

group; all were robed alike, and the heads of all were completely enveloped in impenetrable black veils; but her father held the rein of one—the dreaded Abbess was before her.

Had not Morgante whispered in her ear, “Now lady, now, descend,” all the rehearsals of the morning would have availed nothing, so wholly absorbed was she in contemplating the figure that approached. Thus reminded, however, she stepped forward, with a haste as graceful as it was natural, and, as the Count turned the head of the mule aside, dropped on her knees and kissed the long white garment of the Abbess.

She could not look up to meet the eye she dreaded, but as she knelt, the holy lady bent forward over her, and the ample folds of her black veil fell around the head of Juliet. She shuddered.

“Rise, Juliet! rise, my child!” said a voice, in a whisper of such sweet gentleness, that the unexpected tone brought tears to the poor girl’s eyes.

She stood up, and now longing to look at the

face she had so dreaded to see, fixed her searching eyes upon the veil; but it defied her glance.

Two grooms stood ready to assist the Abbess from her saddle, but giving her hand to the Count, she dismounted without further help. He led her up the steps, and through the hall into the parlour, which had been especially prepared for her.

Juliet alone followed. Even the nuns remained waiting in the hall, till they should receive the commands of the Abbess.

On entering this favourite apartment, the Abbess threw aside her veil, and looking round it, exclaimed, in a voice of great emotion, "My dear mother!"

Juliet, who was about to approach, intending again to kneel, and ask her blessing, stood like one petrified before her.

"That the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's? That my father's sister?" The words rose to her lip, but did not pass them. It was not, however, fear that stopped them; she no longer thought of fear, no longer felt it; but astonishment, almost amounting to stupefaction took its place.

The works of Titian hung upon the walls; she had seen her own bright and youthful image in her glass, but the face she now gazed upon was so majestic in its loveliness, so touching in its pale and quiet beauty, that from mere admiration she now longed to kneel before her.

The expression of that perfect face, when Juliet first beheld it, was as soft and feminine, as its features were regular and noble. Tears fell upon the cheeks of the Abbess as she repeated, “My dear mother!—This was her own parlour, Theodore.”

The Count seemed completely thrown out of his play, by this expression of natural feeling. Without replying to her words, he said, “My lady Abbess,—will you take this chair of state?—Juliet! kneel down, and ask the holy blessing of your aunt.”

His sister placed herself in the chair he had led her to, but seemed unconscious of his words. Juliet followed, and falling at her feet, looked up in her face with an expression of love,

admiration, and reverence, that could not be mistaken.

The Abbess examined her features with an appearance of deep interest. She parted her dark ringlets, and kissing her forehead, exclaimed, "Juliet! dear, precious child! you are her very image!"

"The holy ladies, sister? What is your will? Are they to enter here?"

"Yes, sir—bid them come in."

Juliet was so struck by the altered countenance and voice of the Abbess, as she spoke these words, that she rose from her knees, as if electrified. The voice was rich and harmonious, but the accent, that of absolute command; the features were a model of majestic beauty, but at that moment they expressed pride, reserve, and almost austerity.

Meanwhile the nuns, together with the four attendant priests, were ushered into the room; and Father Laurence followed, leading his patron's heir. The little boy was so completely awe-struck by the appearance of the whole party,

that it was not without difficulty the confessor had induced him to enter; but the priest well knew that he must not appear without him. It was fortunate that he had so discreetly exercised his authority, for the moment the Count perceived them, he stepped forward, and taking the boy's hand, said—

“You are late, sir, in coming, where you should so much wish to be:—kneel down, my son.”

“Benedicite!” said the Abbess, extending her hand towards him. But neither by look nor action, did she relax the stately reserve she had assumed.

Juliet's eyes were fixed immoveably upon her—“Is it the same?” she said internally, “is that the face which a moment ago expressed such tenderness?”

A feeling of bitter disappointment fell upon her spirits, as she now watched her aunt. Sweet tempered, and affectionate in the extreme, Juliet's heart had melted within her, as she listened to the touching voice that spoke of a mother who

was no more ; and not only did her terrors vanish, but all her hideous forebodings seemed so many sins of injustice, which she longed to atone for by affection. No one was ever born with a more loving nature than Juliet, but few have been placed in a situation where there was so little to call their feelings into action ; her young brother, and her petted page, were long the only beings she could dare to love. Lately, indeed,—very lately,—another object had crossed her path, and awakened a sentiment strong in every woman's breast ; stronger still in those whose affections have not before been called forth,—but strongest of all in the ardent imagination and glowing heart of an Italian girl. Yet during the first moments of her aunt's arrival, she felt that she had still more love to give. Her imagination had been seized upon by surprise, at seeing a woman still in the meridian of her beauty, when she had expected, (with no very good reason perhaps) age, ugliness, and severity.

In young and affectionate hearts there is

always an inclination to love what they admire; and before the unfortunate revulsion of feeling, produced by the Count's question, Juliet thought she had found a mother, sister, and friend in one.

But now, as she watched her cold and proud demeanour, and the haughty reserve with which she received even the adulation of her brother, she felt that, notwithstanding her attractive exterior, this revered aunt could still be terrible.

The remainder of the day passed in solemn stateliness. Juliet persevered in respectful and ceremonious attendance, but no look or word of tenderness recalled the vision of the morning. At length the bell rang for vespers. The Abbess and her attendant nuns entered the chapel by a private door from the Count's library, which opened upon a gallery overlooking the altar.

This gallery, which was used only by the Count and his children, had been, on the present occasion, surrounded with deep curtains of purple silk, that no curious eye from the chapel below

might disturb the sacred privacy of the recluses' devotions.

Juliet was commanded by her father to attend the Abbess to this private door, and to enter with her, if invited to do so; but if not, to retire, and take her station with the family below.

It was this arrangement, which, like all the rest of the ceremonials, had been repeated and canvassed again and again, that had induced Juliet to fix on the hour of vespers for her assignation with her lover; she knew that the whole household would be in the chapel—that the service would be lengthened by a solemn thanksgiving for the safe arrival of the Abbess, and that by retiring respectfully, without waiting for the expected invitation, as soon as her page had opened the private door for the holy group to enter, she could be missed by neither party.

The little hand of Morgante trembled with eagerness, as he closed the door of the gallery upon the Abbess and her nuns.

“Now, lady, come with speed. He knows

that all is safe, and if we tarry, he may chance to venture too far on the way towards you."

. Juliet bounded lightly along the terrace, down the steps, and to the postern door. The page unclosed it, and there, even there, within a hundred yards of all who must not see him, stood the fair-haired stranger.

CHAPTER VI.

Disse Morgante^x o gentil cavaliere
Per lo tuo Dio, non mi dir villania;
Di grazia il nome tuo vorrei sapere.

PULCI.

I FEAR that to the young ladies of England, of the year 1833, my Juliet must have already appeared (to say the least of it) a very thoughtless and imprudent person; and I have not yet told the worst circumstance of her foolish love affair. She actually knew neither the name nor the country of her lover. How she chanced to meet him shall be explained hereafter, though no extenuation of her imprudence will be found in the manner of it.

In fact, Juliet's only excuse lay in her most

child-like innocence, and in the peculiar circumstances of her position. She had never known a mother. The noble lady who gave her birth, died whilst she was still an infant, and no female had been provided, who could ever pretend to take her place. The mother of Olive had waited upon the late Countess from the time of her marriage, and her daughter, having been brought up in the castle, was chosen on the recommendation of Father Laurence, as Juliet's principal attendant, after she returned from the convent where she received her education. No single being was near her on whom she could with propriety bestow either confidence or affection. Her proud father was quite out of the question. Her young brother, though mild and amiable in temper, was incapable of being more to her than a petted plaything; and poor little Morgante, though the most faithful of pages, was hardly fit, with all his sharp wit and ready invention, to be the sole confidant of the beautiful and high-born Juliet. Yet so it was. Nevertheless, it is but justice towards Morgante to confess, that, in

the present instance, his discretion had shown itself to great advantage ; for he had more than once ventured to hint that he heartily wished his young mistress knew something of her lover's name and rank. That the latter was noble, however, he found it was treason to doubt, and therefore ceased to glance at the possibility of its being otherwise ; but that it would be desirable to know his name, was an opinion by which he held stoutly, and against this, Juliet had never brought any very powerful objections.

During the interview of the evening before, into which, as he brought only a verbal message, he thought he might wedge something resembling a question, Morgante had most respectfully insinuated, to him of the green and silver, that his having the condescension to communicate his name would be a circumstance likely to be extremely well received by the Lady Juliet d'Albano.

The young man laughed heartily, but betrayed no symptom of being offended.

“Let me be called Amadis,” said he gaily ; “the name would do excellently well, but should you think otherwise, boy, I have no sort of objection to your giving me any other your fancy may prefer.”

As this attempt was unsuccessful, Morgante made no mention of it to his mistress, but, as usual, she repaired to the assignation, fully determined that before she returned, she would take measures to learn what it so deeply imported her to know.

The meeting was all that lovers’ sweet stolen meetings must be—made up of rapture, anguish, fear, and hope. Juliet told him all—but alas ! he told her nothing, excepting, indeed, that she was dearer to him than his life, and that he would never permit her being immured within the hateful walls of a cloister.

“No, Juliet,” he continued, “that shall never be ; and, moreover, pretty one, I will have thee for my wife, or never press the hand of woman in marriage.”

“O tell me, then,” she replied, “tell me—

what it is so cruel to refuse—why is this mystery? Can you not trust me?—— I tell you all ——.”

Tears came to the eyes of Juliet as she spoke, on seeing which, the gay aspect of the young man was changed to a look of great disquietude; he withdrew the arm that he had thrown round her, and said, mournfully,—

“I have already told you, Juliet, that you must trust—or else abandon me for ever.”

“And shall I never know ——.”

“Distract me not,” said he, interrupting her vehemently, “with questions that I cannot answer. I love you—and will make you mine, or perish.”

“And with no stain, Sir, upon my noble name?” said Juliet, with more dignity than she had ever assumed in speaking to him.

The bright blue eyes of the youth fixed themselves upon her with a meaning that she could not interpret, while his lips displayed his beautiful teeth as they parted—not to answer her solemn question; but as it should seem to make a jest

of it, for a smile of irrepressible merriment took possession of his features.

The blood of all the Albanos rose to the cheeks and forehead of Juliet. Her lover saw it, and instantly changing the air of levity which had so deeply wounded her, replied in a tone as serious as her own, "Would to heaven, Juliet, no greater difficulties lay between us, than that of proving to you, how dear I hold your honour ——."

"Nay, I will not—I cannot doubt you—farewell!—farewell!" said Juliet, angry with herself for having for a moment been angry with him.

"Yet, go not, till you have promised to be here at the same hour to-morrow. There is much to render my remaining on this coast highly imprudent; but while your fate remains in this uncertainty, I cannot go. It must be settled soon—is it not so? When does the Abbess leave you?"

Juliet replied, by giving him all the information in her power; and respecting her promise of returning the following evening at the same

hour, took her lingering departure, just in time to hear the last notes of the "Hosanna in excelsis," as she hurried past the windows of the chapel.

Exactly at the proper moment, the page unclosed the door of the gallery, and Juliet stood beside it with downcast eyes.

Her heart beat so violently, both from agitation and exercise, that she almost feared its strong pulsations would betray her. She blessed the respectful silence to which her duty restricted her, for to have spoken a single word she felt must have been impossible. Perhaps while rejoicing in her security, she forgot the heightened colour of her cheeks.

The Abbess walked a few paces towards her chamber in silence, with Juliet by her side; she then stopped, and looking in her face, pronounced her name, with the same sweet tone in which she had first spoken it. Juliet raised her eyes; but there was something in the glance she encountered, that made her instantly drop them again. There was no expression of curious scru-

tiny, and still less of angry severity in the glance—but there was a smile, so full of meaning, that she felt almost certain she was betrayed.

“Go to your room, my child,” said her mysterious aunt, “repose yourself—I shall not require your attendance again this evening, and will tell your father that I have dismissed you.—Benedicite !”

Once more within the shelter of her chamber, Juliet set herself to review all the events of the last agitating twenty-four hours.

Within that time she had heard the cloister pronounced to be her fate, by one who was only too well informed upon the subject; she had listened to vows of eternal love from one whom her young fancy clung to, with all the tenderness of woman’s first affection—and—not the least important circumstance in these eventful hours—she had seen the saintly Abbess of Sant’ Catharina’s, so long unknown, and so deeply feared. Not all the tender recollections of that hour of love, not all the terror of her threatened fate, could long detain her thoughts, or even divide

them with this last object of wonder, interest, and mystery.

Why amid all the epithets of admiration so lavishly used by her father, when speaking of his sister Geraldine, did the word *beautiful* never occur? It was many years since they had met, but could he have forgotten her? Why had she not been told that this extraordinary person was still in the full pride of womanly beauty? What was her history? How had she already attained to power and influence, so greatly exceeding that of any other person of equal rank?

To answer these questions was beyond her power, nor was it less so, to define what were the sentiments with which this extraordinary woman had inspired her.—Love, fear, and curiosity were so equally blended, that she knew not which occupied her most. But more than all, perhaps, that strange smile rested on her memory.—What could it mean?

There was something very like enjoyment to Juliet, after a day of such varied and strong emotion, in the perfect silence and solitude of her

twilight chamber, and the power of musing uninterruptedly on all the circumstances of her situation.—Had she been ten years older, she would have seen more reason for fearing, that her father's pleasure respecting her would be fulfilled, than that her nameless lover should find the means of preventing it,—but at sixteen, love and hope are too firmly united for common sense to divorce them, and her reverie was far from being painful. Happily for Juliet, her inquisitive handmaid was too agreeably occupied in showing off her eyes and her ribbons to the new comers, both lay and spiritual, to trouble her mistress with her presence, and she was still sitting deep in thought, unmindful of the darkness, when a gentle tap at the door, broke in upon her meditation.

“Come in,” she said, and her page entered, bearing a lamp, and a salver on which was placed a small cup of wine, with some dried fruit and biscuit.

Morgante was never unobservant, even in his most trickish moods, of any thing concerning Lady Juliet; he had this day stood behind her,

as usual, both at dinner and supper, and remarked, that whatever dainties were put upon her plate, she had no appetite to eat them; so having discovered that Olive was deeply engaged in the performance of her various hospitable duties, he possessed himself of the refreshments above-mentioned, and repaired to his solitary mistress.

Juliet, intent as were her meditations, was not sorry to be so interrupted. The gossip of her little page was always full of matter, and while rewarding his attention by taking what he had brought, she willingly listened to all he was bursting to say.

“What think you of her, Signora? We did not expect to see any thing like that, did we? Why, she looks like a queen—or an angel! I should as soon have thought to see the Pope look like me, as an Abbess like her.”

“In truth, Morgante, my aunt is wondrously little like what I expected to see her.—What says Father Laurence concerning her?”

“He seems as much afraid of her as the Count

himself does. I would, Signora, that you had watched him at table, as I did; he was showing off to the quiet Father Anselmo, that's the great lady's confessor you know, he was showing off to him, how much at home he was in the grand castle; he pushed the wine cup to the good father, who still refused it, and then he drained it manfully himself; but, as his ill luck would have it, just as his jolly face was withdrawn from the flagon, he met the lady Abbess's wonderful eyes wide open, and fixed upon him. Oh! you should have seen him, Signora," continued the boy, skipping with delight, "you should have seen how he tried to put his features back into seemly order: I looked at the Abbess then, and there was a smile upon her lip; perhaps, Signora, you have not seen her smile yet? I never saw any body speak before, without using their tongue, but her smile said plainly, 'Oh you drunken old varlet! you think that I don't see what you are about—but you are mistaken there, Master Priest; I can see almost as far into thy greedy, wine-bibbing heart, as God himself.'

That was exactly what the smile meant, Signora, I am quite sure of it."

"And Olive, Morgante, what says she to my aunt?"

"Why the baggage had the confidence to say to Father Laurence, with her saucy leer, 'Well, Father, I would be a nun myself, if I thought I should look as handsome in a veil as our Lady Abbess:' he whispered something in her ear that made her blush, and blush she well might, for her impudence—she look as handsome as the Abbess!"

"My dear Morgante," said Juliet, laughing, "your head seems absolutely turned by my beautiful aunt."

"Is it not a pity, lady, that she should be a nun? And yet what a state she holds! Perhaps she likes her power and her pomp, better than a husband and children."

"Very likely, Morgante, so waste no more regrets on her—she is a mystery that neither you nor I shall easily unravel.—How do her followers conduct themselves?"

“ Of that, Signora, I know but little, for I have not been much among them.—I like that gentle old man, her confessor; as to her nuns, I will only say, that they are wondrously little like herself.”

“ Who is with the Abbess now, Morgante?”

“ Marry, lady, my lord the Count—shut up all alone with her in your parlour. I marvel he showed so much joy at her coming, for by St. Francis, he seems to stand as much in awe of her, as our village boys do of the dominie.”

“ Tush, boy! a good Catholic always testifies respect before the dignitaries of his church, whatever relation he may bear them: they are now together then, Morgante?”

“ Yes, Signora—and the lady nuns are shut up by themselves in the east parlour. Poor souls! I warrant they are tired enough of their company!”

“ Well! good night, boy; it is time we both should go to rest. Tell Olive, she need not come to me to-night; her cares must be wanted for our numerous guests. Good night, Morgante.”

CHAPTER VII.

I am not of this people nor this age.

BYRON.

MEANWHILE the Lady Geraldine and her brother were engaged in earnest conversation. Soon after dismissing Juliet, the Abbess went to the parlour prepared for her, accompanied by her nuns; but finding the Count and his son already there, she signified her wish that they should leave her.

Hitherto the Abbess had taken but little notice of the pretty boy, who was considered by his father as so very important a personage; but seeing him now looking at her timidly, she held out her hand, and drawing him gently towards

her, said, "This is truly an Italian face, Theodore, and a very lovely one; but Juliet, with the brow of Italy, has almost the complexion of England. She wonderfully resembles our mother."

The Count crossed himself, and his lips moved slightly, as if in inward prayer. The Lady Geraldine did not appear to notice him, but seating herself in the chair of state, made Ferdinand place himself on the cushion at her feet.

"And what are you to be, my pretty sir?" she said, caressing the dark ringlets of his beautiful hair, "A soldier? an ambassador? or a cardinal?"

"He is not yet eleven years old, Geraldine. It is at present too early to decide."

"Most surely.—I did but jest with him."

"Where is the Lady Juliet?" said the Count abruptly. "Methinks she is strangely negligent in her duty, not to be in attendance on you, sister."

"Not so, indeed. As we returned from

vespers, I remarked that she looked fatigued, and bade her go to rest. I fear, my Lord, the noble reception you have given me and my train, has cost you trouble.”

Had Count Theodore lived half a century later, his polite reply would have laid him open to the charge of plagiarism, for it was very like that of Macbeth,

The labour we delight in physics pain.

As it was, however, he had, as he deserved, full credit for it, and the Abbess bowed her thanks very graciously.

It now occurred to the Count, that the absence of Juliet afforded a favourable opportunity for conversing with Lady Geraldine respecting her, and he dismissed the boy to his rest.

“He is, indeed, a lovely child,” said the Abbess, as he closed the door behind him.—
“I have seldom seen a handsomer face.”

“He is the last of his race, sister,” said the Count, with somewhat of a pathetic whine, “and though I, of all men living, should and would be the last to refuse a child to the church, and

though I should consider the having another cardinal added to our pedigree as an honour, glory, and blessing, yet, as the race would be extinct in the case of Ferdinand's becoming as you hinted——”

“ Do not think it, brother—I did but jest with the boy. You could not object more strongly to his being withdrawn from the world, than I should do.”

The vain father was delighted.

“ It would, indeed,” he replied, drawing himself up, as if the better to sustain the weight of all his dignities, “ It would, indeed, be doing ill to our country to place the eighth Count d’Albano in a situation that must prevent his perpetuating his illustrious house !”

“ God forbid you should do so.”

“ You are right, Geraldine, you are right ; so far the Catholic yields to the patriot. But you have taught us, sister, that a daughter, dedicated to the church, may bring as much glory to her race as the holiest cardinal that ever wore a hat. I, too, have a daughter, and I freely, joy-

fully, triumphantly, bestow her on the church. Juliet shall return with you to Sant' Catherina's—and there—with your good pleasure, she shall take the vows."

"Juliet?"

Geraldine d'Albano was naturally so pale that such a blush as now dyed her cheeks could not pass unobserved. The Count was completely puzzled, and the more so, as her eyes being stedfastly fixed on the ground, he lost the assistance of any commentary which they might have afforded. A moment's silence followed, and then the Count resumed.

"I trust, sister, that no levity in the manner and bearing of my daughter leads you to consider her as unworthy of the honour designed her?"

"Has Juliet expressed any wish to take the veil?"

"Juliet is very young, and has never, I believe, given a thought to the future in any way."

"Then you have not announced to her your purpose?"

“Never distinctly—I have sometimes hinted that a high calling was before her.”

“And how did she receive it?”

“She is so mere a child, that it would be difficult to judge what passes in her thoughts. It is you, Geraldine, who will, I hope, communicate this intelligence to her.”

“Should I find her ill-disposed towards our holy calling—you will, of course, abandon the idea of it.”

“Think not so lightly of me, Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s. Though my fate has not given me occasion to display such strength of character, as we know has distinguished you, yet I trust I never have been found weak or vacillating. I intend my daughter for the cloister, and, assuredly, I can imagine no reason whatsoever, which, by any possibility, could induce me to change my purpose.”

To this declaration, pronounced with all the pompous obstinacy of a weak proud man, the Abbess made no reply; she continued to listen in silence, for some time longer, to the self-lau-

datory strain in which the Count delighted to indulge; but, at length, taking advantage of a short pause, she rose and expressed a wish of retiring for the night.

Her ceremonious brother would not let her leave the room, till he had summoned half-a-score of lackeys to light her through the hall: he accompanied her himself to the foot of the staircase, and took his leave for the night, with the agreeable conviction that he had impressed her with deep feelings, both of his sanctity and wisdom.

While the noble brother and sister were thus engaged, Olive, partly from curiosity, and partly from good nature, was cultivating the acquaintance of the nuns.

She did not, however, enter their parlour till she had first satisfied herself that her cares were not wanted elsewhere.

Her good friend, Father Laurence, was enjoying an hour's comfortable conversation with the almoner, who was the only one of the

Abbess's party with whom he had succeeded in his attempts to be agreeable.

The other priests had already retired for the night, and the rest of the suite were engaged suitably to their respective situations in it, with the different members of the household.

"Is there any thing, dear ladies, that I can get for you, or do for you?" said Olive, as she entered the parlour of the nuns. "I fear you must find yourselves very lonely here."

"Not so, daughter," said the eldest of the party, "every thing is well ordered, and exceedingly comfortable."

"And so it is, indeed," said another, "but since the damsel is so careful of us, it is but right to tell her that sister Beatrice has been far from well ever since we landed. She complains of sad pains about the chest and stomach, and I am of opinion, sister Martha, that a cup of warm wine, well medicated with spice and sugar, would be of singular comfort to her."

"I will not deny but it might," replied the

elder recluse, "but it is getting late, and, I fear, it might be giving more trouble than we would wish—but truly ——"

"Do not speak of trouble," said Olive, with hospitable alacrity, "it is both a duty and a pleasure to wait upon holy ladies like you. But don't you think, something nice and dainty, in the way of cakes or biscuits, would make the wine more palatable—and there is good store of such things prepared—I took care of that."

"I am sure she is fit to be a nun herself," said sister Beatrice, "so kind and thoughtful!"

Olive was so active in her researches, that she returned with a quickness, which not only proved her own zeal, but that of her assistants. She was followed by two inferior damsels, the one carrying a lamp, with a silver posset-dish upon it, of very comfortable dimensions, and the other, a tray, containing sundry trifles, which the well-judging Olive thought might be beneficial to the invalid, or agreeable to her companions.

She had every reason to believe that her kind attentions were not displeasing to any of the holy

ladies, who not only partook freely of what she set before them, but entered with great affability into conversation with her.

“It is really a pity,” said the venerable sister Martha, sipping the cup which Olive had presented to her, from the cheering composition on the lamp, “It is, indeed, a pity and a sorrow, that such a sightly damsel as you are, should be affronted every day you live, by having the bold eyes of ungodly men cast upon you.—How well she would look in a bandeau and hood, sister Clara,—wouldn’t she?”

“She would be a perfect picture,” replied the nun she addressed; “there is certainly no head-gear in all Italy, that sets off fine eyes, like the bandeau of the White Dominicans.”

“But perhaps, daughter,” observed another, “you may have formed some earthly attachment, that would make it inconvenient for you to become the spouse of Christ?”

“You need not be afraid to speak before sister Martha,” said a third; “she is very good natured. Come tell us all your history—will you?”

Olive, who perhaps had some doubts whether her own history would be sufficiently edifying for so select an audience, varied the subject by saying, "Oh, dear ladies! if you like to hear stories of true love, you ought to be told that which belongs, as I may say, to this very castle, where you now are; and I only wish that I could tell it to you as beautifully as Father Laurence told it to me—I am right sure it would draw tears from your holy eyes."

"Nay, good daughter, let us hear you tell it," said sister Martha.

"I do not think any one could tell it better," said sister Beatrice.

"I am sure I would rather hear you than any body," said sister Johanna.

"Now, pray begin—pray do, Signora," said sister Clara.

Thus encouraged on all sides, Olive replied very modestly, "I will do the very best I can, ladies, and I hope you will please to excuse me, if my words don't shape themselves together, as those of a more learned speaker would do."

The four recluses urged her almost clamorously to proceed, and accordingly, having first carefully replenished the four little cups of her auditors, as well as her own, she began as follows:—

“A great many hundred years ago, Father Laurence I believe knows the exact time, but I have forgotten it, there was another castle, almost as big as this, at twenty miles away from it, somewhere near Marano, I think it was. The lord of the castle was a great warrior, but he was nevertheless quite young, and he fell in love with the daughter of the ancestor of my lord the Count—for you know, ladies, of course, that nobody but the ancestors of my lord the Count ever came near this place, that is, to own it, since the beginning of time. The young lady’s name was Madalina, and a most beautiful lady she was, by all accounts. The story says, that she was nowise behind-hand with the warlike knight in her love, for she doated upon him to distraction, and that she proved in the end, poor soul.”

“ Poor dear lady !” softly exclaimed sister Clara.

“ Hush, hush ! sister Clara—pray do not interrupt:—go on, Signora.”

“ She loved him to distraction, and used, whenever he was expected at the castle, to walk out into the woods to meet him. Part of the wood remains to this very day, to show the way she walked, but it was much wilder and wider then, Father Laurence says ; yet it is awful to think that some of the very same trees are standing there to this day.”

Here Olive felt a shiver come over her, and sipped a little wine.

“ But why ?—why is it awful ?” said sister Beatrice, trembling.

“ The holy martyrs protect us !—how blue the lamp burns !” remarked sister Martha.

“ Go on, dear daughter—go on !”

“ For the love of the Holy Virgin, don’t keep us waiting !”

“ She walked out into that wood there,” continued Olive, pointing with her finger to one

corner of the room; the nuns trembled, and drew nearer together. "She walked out upon a certain evening into that wood, to meet him. And now, ladies, you shall hear what is an awful warning—that is, for such poor perilous girls as me. I know it is not wanted by holy ladies like you, but it is known for a certainty, that Lady Madalina was thinking of her lover that evening, all the time of vespers, and that when the priest at the end, said Benedi—I can't speak it properly, ladies, but I dare say you all know what I mean?"

"Benedicat vos omnipotens Deus, Pater, et Filius, et Spiritus Sanctus," chanted sister Martha, in a loud nasal tone.

"Yes, yes, just that, sister Martha.—Well, at the end, instead of saying, Amen! she said, Giovanni! which was the name of her lover!"

The four nuns groaned, and crossed themselves.

"Some say," continued Olive, "that her rosary and cross fell off at that very moment, and that being too much occupied by her inward

thoughts of love, to remark it; she went out from the chapel, and into the woods, without the least mark of the Christian religion about her."

"Unhappy creature! And what became of her, Olive?" said sister Clara, with tears in her eyes.

"Nay, you shall hear. She had crossed the stream at the bottom of the garden, you can see it out of that very window by daylight, she had crossed the stream, and climbed the bank, and got fairly into the very thickest of the wood, when she suddenly found, that instead of it being pleasant summer twilight, as she expected, it was as dark as winter midnight. She stood stock still, as you may well believe, not knowing which way to turn, nor what to do; when in a moment she saw——Sister Beatrice, I am afraid that your cordial has got entirely cold.—God bless you," touching the cup, "this will do you no more good than nothing; why, ladies, you all look as if you wanted something to warm you—let us set the posset-dish over the lamp again, with a little more spice and sugar, and

just the least little drop in the world more wine, —here is plenty in the flagon;—there now, it will boil in a moment, and then there will be some comfort in it.”

None of the party objected to this experiment, but sister Johanna testified a little impatience when she perceived that the assiduous Olive, while spicing, sugaring, and stirring the mixture, appeared altogether to have forgotten her story.

“ Cannot you go on, Signora Olive ? let me stir the posset-dish.”

Olive yielded the spoon.

“ Where was I ?”

“ Where it was quite dark, and she was going to see something.”

“ Yes, truly ; she saw all in a moment—take care, sister Johanna ! you will upset the dish as sure as can be. Let me see to it, sister—it will be ready in a moment, and then we can go on comfortable again.”

This being evidently the best arrangement, both for the story and the cordial, it was quietly

submitted to; and the little cups being again filled, and another portion of cake distributed, Olive began again with all the renewed comfort she had predicted.

“All in a moment the wood seemed to be lighted up, as if there were hundreds and thousands of torches, and candles in every tree, and at the same time she heard the most violent laughter and merriment all round her. You may well believe she was terrified enough, but presently her terror was changed to grief and woe, for she saw walking towards her——who do you think?”

“Nay, tell!”

“Who—but her own Giovanni, in full dress, just as if he were going to be married, that minute—and then comes the sorrow—for by his side was a most beautiful young lady! She was leaning upon his arm, and dressed like the most elegant bride in the world. And as they came on towards the unhappy Lady Madalina, he did nothing, saving your holy presence, but

kiss, and make love to her—think how the young lady of our castle must have felt !”

“ Poor soul !” sighed the kind-hearted nuns.

“ She swooned away, for as you may guess, she could do nothing else, and when she recovered, she found herself in her own bed, but how she got there, she could never give any account. The young Lord Giovanni was never heard of from that day to this, though it was well known that he set out that very same day, to pay one of his constant visits to this castle. But he never got here, that is certain, and——”

At this moment Marietta brought word, that the Lady Abbess was in her room—on which the party hastily broke up, and the nuns, ushered by Olive, repaired to the chamber of their superior, to learn if she had any commands for them before she retired to rest.

CHAPTER VIII.

Il ne faut jamais renonc~~er~~ au bonheur. Les sources du bien et du mal sont cachées, et nous ignorons laquelle doit s'ouvrir, pour arroser l'espace de la vie.

SAINT LAMBERT.

It was Juliet's habit to rise almost with the sun, and enjoy among her flowers the delicious coolness of the early morning.

Of her scanty stock of pleasures, this was perhaps the dearest, for she could enjoy it without danger of interruption.

Her lordly father would have deemed his dignity affronted, had he not believed that every inmate of his castle had, in greater or less degree, been occupied some hours before his rising, in preparing for his appearance among

them. Father Laurence always slept long and soundly, feeling a right to do so from the consciousness that one strong motive for occupying the post of domestic tutor and confessor, at the castle, was the freedom it permitted from those untimely bells, which were wont, at his convent, to drag him from bed, when his very soul was asleep.

Mrs. Olive was dainty and delicate; she had, indeed, repeatedly assured the family confessor, that if he wished to kill her, it would be only necessary to enforce early rising as a penance. The little Ferdinand was much too tender in health, to be suffered to fatigue himself;—and thus, of the few permitted to approach her, Morgante was the only one who ever attended upon Juliet's early rambles.

On the morning after the arrival of the Abbess, the little page, as usual, followed the steps of his young mistress into the garden, where she was enjoying herself in the midst of her flowers, as fair, as fresh, and as dew-besprinkled as themselves. She had on this morning an additional

motive for her early rising, as she was anxious to collect the choicest produce of her flower beds to adorn the altar of the chapel before her aunt should enter there. For this purpose she and her assistant proceeded from one parterre to another ; Juliet stealing their fresh and fragrant treasures, and Morgante bearing them after her, till his little arms could hold no more. She then led the way to an alcove, fronting the east, ~~but~~ with such a leafy labyrinth of boughs trained over it, as effectually to exclude the sun.

She told the boy to deposit his burden on a small table within it, and set herself to arrange her bouquets, while she dispatched him into the castle to seek for strings wherewith to bind them in bunches.

While thus engaged, she stood with her back to the entrance, and had continued so for some minutes, when a voice, which once heard could never be forgotten, pronounced her name. She turned, and saw her aunt standing close behind her.

The Abbess had changed her religious dress for one of the same form and colour, but of lighter materials; and her head had nothing over it but the veil, which was now thrown back, leaving her features entirely uncovered.

Juliet, who had been greatly struck with the regular and noble beauty of her countenance, even when shrouded by the heavy hood of a Dominican abbess, now that she beheld it so much more advantageously, stood silently looking at her, with the most evident astonishment. At length recovering herself, she was about to kneel, and in the usual form, request a blessing, when the Abbess stopped her, and, kissing her forehead, said—"May the Being who made thee innocent, still keep thee so, my Juliet!"

Then laying her hand on Juliet's shoulder, and turning her eyes towards the rising sun, she continued, "This, then, is thy temple, Juliet, and this," looking at the little table, and taking some flowers from it, "this is thine altar."

"Oh no! dear aunt," said Juliet, terrified,

“the temple where I worship is the castle chapel, and these lilies I have gathered for our lady’s altar.”

The Abbess took some of the delicate flowers she mentioned, and placed them among the dark curls of Juliet’s hair.

“They can appear nowhere to greater advantage than they do in your hair, Juliet. These snow-white bells, each twisted into a little sable ringlet, form a head-dress that a queen might envy.”

Startled, and confounded, Juliet knew not what to think, nor what to say. She feared to indulge the feelings of pleasure and affection, which this familiar kindness seemed to authorize, lest she should have mistaken the meaning of the words addressed to her; and while her aunt continued to look at her with smiling fondness, she stood as motionless as a statue.

“Sit down with me, my dear child, and do not look thus terrified at seeing me. What is it you fear, my dear Juliet? What strange tales have they told you of me, that you should

tremble when I approach, and turn pale when I speak to you?"

"Oh! no, no," said Juliet, shaking her head, "no one has ever mentioned your name but in accents of praise and reverence."

The lilies fell from her hair upon her lap as she spoke.

"*'Umile in tanta gloria,'*" said her aunt, smiling, "you shake those lovely blossoms from your head, as if you knew not how well they become you; but come, dear Juliet, cease to tremble, cease to turn pale, and red, and pale again, when you look at me. Whatever I may be to others, I will never be terrible to you.—Tell me, my mother's image, do you think you could learn to love me?"

"Better a thousand times than I have words to speak, if I may dare to do so! Say but once, that I have leave to love you, and I know it will be for ever!"

"For ever be it then!" returned her aunt, embracing her affectionately. "You are a gentle and an innocent creature, Juliet, and as

such might well deserve my love; but you have a claim that touches me still nearer; you are the living picture of my mother. Young as you are, I can trace in the glance of your eye, in the smile of your lip, in the sound of your voice, a resemblance to the only being who ever loved me—to the only being I have ever loved.—You, too, are desolate and alone.—You are now, almost, as once I was.—Almost!—I had no friend to help me.—This is not your case, Juliet,—love me—trust me, and I will save you.”

The powerful emotions produced by these words deprived Juliet of all power to reply to them.

The Abbess continued—“Juliet, my story is a strange one. I hope, ere long, that no reserve will exist between us; then you shall know me as entirely as I hope to know you. So it was between my mother and her Geraldine, so let it be between me and my Juliet.”

It was with pleasure, much greater than she had any power to express, that the motherless girl welcomed this proffered confidence and af-

fection; but so sudden and violent was the change this short half hour had produced in all her ideas, that she felt almost bewildered; she did not attempt to express this in words, but as she sat, holding the hand of her newly-found friend in hers, much of what was passing within, was legible upon her countenance.

“Dear child!” said the Abbess, reading her silent looks, “you hardly know what to make of me. All mystery shall cease between us soon—shall it not, Juliet?”

The delighted girl was about to express her earnest hope that so it might be, when she encountered the same gentle, but meaning smile, which had so discomfited her the evening before. She blushed, faltered, and was silent.

“Come, Juliet, it is time we enter now. My longer stay with you, may be remarked and wondered at. Change nothing, dearest, in your outward manner to me; let me be still the awful Lady Abbess for you in public; but in private, never fear me more.”

The party assembled at breakfast with all the circumstance and ceremony that the Count desired. The grace was long enough for a dozen abbesses, and every thing wore an air of so much state and magnificence, that the lord of the feast swelled with the proud consciousness of his dignified station.

To Juliet and her aunt, the repast appeared painfully prolonged; but at last, like all other human things, it came to an end, and the Abbess retreated to her parlour, sending a message, by Morgante, to her nuns, desiring them to meet her there.

After inquiring, with a stately kindness, for the health of each, she said—

“You are at liberty, my children, to take exercise and recreation, as much as shall please you, within the limits of the castle-gardens; you will find them noble. For myself, family affairs of some importance will engage my time; I have, moreover, much to speak of, with my young niece. I shall, therefore, be debarred of having you near me; but you have your daily

duties of prayer to perform ; and, as I doubt not, you have remembered your embroidery, I hope the hours will not hang heavy with you. The Lady Juliet will instruct her first woman, to show you the way to the gardens.”

Juliet then addressed the recluses with much kindness, requesting them to ask for any thing they might want or wish for, that the castle could afford, and promised that the Signora Olive should immediately wait upon them in their parlour.

They retired, and the aunt and niece were once more alone.

During breakfast Juliet had cautiously sustained the ceremonious manner which her aunt had directed her to preserve ; but now, she looked anxiously in her face for that look of sweet affection which seemed reserved for her alone. Nor was she disappointed ; no sooner had the door closed, than the cold dignity of the Abbess relaxed.

“ Juliet ! my life and youth are renewed,” she said ; “ I am surprised to find that I have

still both hopes and wishes. I thought all that had been quite over with me. I must immediately see my brother—after conversing with him, I will summons you. Send your page, my love, to tell your father that I wish to see him here.”

After indulging in the freedom of a fond caress, to assure herself that she still possessed the treasure so lately won, Juliet left her aunt, and having dismissed Morgante with the message to her father, she again retired to her room, to meditate upon all the wonders of the last few hours.

CHAPTER IX.

Quand on sent qu'on n'a pas de quoi se faire estimer de quelqu'un, on est bien près de le haïr.

VAUVENARGNES.

THE Count, upon receiving the summons of his sister, instantly obeyed it. He found her seated at the window, which commanded Juliet's favourite view. Her eyes were fixed upon the landscape, but she appeared deep in thought. She now wore the white hood of her order, drawn forward, so as nearly to conceal her face, while the long black veil, thrown back, fell over her shoulders. The Abbess saluted him, as he entered, by an inclination of the head, and pointed to a chair which stood opposite to her.

For some moments both were silent, and it was evident, that each intended the other to begin. Though the Count had contrived to persuade himself, that it was utterly impossible (notwithstanding the cold reception given to his proposed dedication of his daughter) for the Abbess really to oppose it, he yet felt at a loss how to resume the subject; and the representative of seven generations of heroes bit his nails. His sister, however, had determined that he should begin the conversation; and as she was not in the habit of deciding upon one thing, and doing another, the silence might have long continued, had not the Count d'Albano happily recollected, that, on this occasion, he stood too firmly for the glance of an eye, the curl of a lip, or all the eloquence of human wit, to shake him.

For a mother of the church to forbid the dedication of a maiden to its altar, was a prodigy which appeared to him altogether incredible. The pope, the conclave, the inquisition, must all support him; and thus encouraged, he drove from his memory the idea of a certain

glance, which had seemed to search him deeply the evening before, when he had mentioned the pious feeling, that had decided him to make a nun of his daughter.

“Have you announced to Juliet, sister, the honour which awaits her?” he began.

“I have announced nothing to her, Theodore, but that I love her well: you are happy, brother, in so sweet a child. Does she not recall to you, every hour of the day, our dearest mother?”

So many years had passed since the Count and his sister had conversed together, excepting for a formal half hour in the parlour of her convent, that while his daily increasing bigotry had been teaching him to shudder at the name of his heretic mother, he retained little recollection of the attachment, amounting almost to idolatry, which his sister had felt for her. His education, and a situation he held, almost when a child, at the court of Rome, had so early separated him from his family, that he remembered nothing of the mutual love, the devoted tenderness, which for eighteen years had bound this

mother and daughter together in a country, and a home, that seemed equally foreign to both. Thus, while for nearly twenty years the son had been heaping accumulating merits upon his head, by public and private reprobation of his mother, the daughter was cherishing her memory, with the fondness which a desolate heart feels for what had once made its comfort and its joy.

Little sympathy, therefore, could be expected between them on this subject. Had a heretic been named in such a manner by any other, though that heretic had been ten times his mother, he would have known how to receive it; but to accuse the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's of falling away from the faith—that was quite impossible. The Count, therefore, remained silent; so did the Abbess, for there was something swelling at her heart to which she could not give utterance.

It was again the Count who was obliged to break the silence.

“Were I not certain, sister, that my daugh-

ter Juliet is as pure in heart and faith, as she is lovely in feature, I would not, for my golden spurs, have offered her as a spouse to Christ."

"What is your motive, my lord Count, for wishing to immure your only daughter in a cloister?"

While speaking these words, the Abbess threw back her hood, and fixed upon him a pair of eyes, whose glance no mortal, conscious of a purpose to conceal, could abide without quailing. It was in vain that he looked at the window, and then on the ground; that he turned his head, first to one side, and then to the other; her eye was still upon him, and he felt it. "What is your motive, my lord Count?"

"My motive, Geraldine? What can it be," and here he crossed himself, "what can it be, but the devotion of a pious Catholic, who, by the gift of his child to God, would atone for the sin of his father, in grafting on his pure and noble stock, a scion of accursed infidelity. It is the same motive, Abbess of Sant' Catherina's,

which led to your own profession. May the glory you have brought to the church be placed to his account, and stand against the grievous sin of his heretical marriage !”

For twenty years had Geraldine d’Albano been schooling her features to speak only as she would have them, but the passion which now stirred within her led them to rebel, and, for a moment, all of anger, scorn, and defiance, that a look could speak, seemed darting from her eyes. She half rose from her chair, and waving her hand for him to leave her, almost pronounced the word which trembled on her tongue; but ere “*wretch*” had fully passed her lips, her habitual caution returned; she resumed her stately, tranquil attitude, and said, “Leave me, Sir; I have heard the name of a saint in heaven blasphemed—and must do penance for it.”

It is impossible to describe the Count’s state of mind as he left the room; to remain in it, even for a moment, he dared not. Mortification the most bitter succeeded to the glow of pride

which had dilated his bosom, from the hour this visit from his sister had been promised him. Not only had the proposal, for which he had expected honor and thanks, been coldly listened to, and almost rejected, but that precise point in his character (the reprobation of his heretic mother) for which he had held himself entitled to supererogatory merit, was declared, by one whose word was canon law, to be a source of blasphemy. Enraged and confounded, the agitated nobleman immediately sought his confessor.

Fortunately that good man was not far distant, being engaged in giving a lesson in chanting to the little Morgante. He instantly obeyed his patron's call, and they retired together to the library.

Having carefully closed the door, the Count proceeded to relieve his bosom of the load which oppressed it, and immediately found consolation from the wise and pious counsel of the priest.

“Be calm, my son,” said he, “disturb not your noble nature for so slight a cause; if the

Lady Abbess, your most reverend sister, has so weak a point about her, as to cleave with lingering fondness to the memory of an heretical mother, it is she must tremble, my lord Count, not you. Were she the pope and conclave all in one, she dare not own so much."

"Say you so, good Father? Have I, indeed, a hold upon this haughty woman?"

"Ay, marry, have you, my son—if she has spoken as you say."

"She has, holy Father—she has—and she looked ——"

"For that," answered Father Laurence, "I fancy we must let her alone—for even if she was caught making mouths at the pope, I doubt if the church could take cognizance of it. Not but that her looks are most pernicious looks—I saw her yesterday—but no matter."

"Yes, but it is, good Father, and great matter too—what saw you yesterday?"

"Nothing to put her in the hands of the holy office, I believe—but let that pass. Now listen to me, my son—but first let me give you abso-

lution for the unseemly passion you have fallen into."

The Count kneeled down, and the Confessor muttered his "Absolvo te."

"And now, my lord Count, let us speak like men of business. As to your laying an accusation of heresy against the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, I humbly presume you do not dream of any thing one thousandth part so absurd? Why, my beloved son, both you and your poor Confessor would be in the lowest dungeon of the blessed Inquisition, before either of us knew why or wherefore—not to mention that I have no doubt the devil would visit us there. No, no, my son, that will never do. Nevertheless, I think you might venture to give this proud lady a hint, that it is just possible an Abbess may be caught stumbling, when she happens to put herself into a rage with the most pious and illustrious nobleman in Italy."

The Count began to soften.

"You are right, holy Father, you are very right. It would ill bescem me to attain the

sanctity of my sister. For the love of the blessed saints and martyrs, I will abstain—and may they remember it when my soul is in purgatory !”

“ They will, my son — they must — they shall.”

“ Nevertheless, as you were saying, holy Father, it were as well to give her a hint.— What think you of going yourself to visit her ?”

“ What should we gain by that, my son ?” said Father Laurence, wincing at the proposal. “ Surely it is not I, who should attempt to enforce upon her the profession of the Lady Juliet ?”

“ And why not, good Father ? It is you, who, have had the care of her spiritual condition, and who, so well as you can, testify, that she is worthy to receive the honour intended for her ?”

The Confessor uttered a sound, which at first nearly resembled a whistle, but it ended in a long drawn sigh.

“ I have told you, once and again, my son, it must be within the cloister, that our Lady Juliet

shall feel her holy calling—on the outside of it, she never will.”

“And I have told you, Sir, that my daughter must be a nun. Where am I to find the gold which is to pay your midnight masses for my short abode in purgatory? Where are your benevolences, and your fees, and your candles to come from? Tell me that.”

The monk held up his finger, as if in warning.

“Nay, nay, I am not warm,” continued the Count, “I know what you would say—but in speaking this, I do not threaten the church, as you call it. Truth is truth, Father Laurence—my rents are spent three months before they are due. Juliet must be a nun.”

“Assuredly, my son; and a most fair nun will she be—and doubtless a gentle. So, if it needs must be, I will go, and do your bidding to the Abbess.”

He turned to leave the room, as he spoke, but the Count stopped him.

“A little more ceremony, Father, will be both necessary and becoming. We will send

my daughter's page to ask an audience for you."

Morgante was accordingly dispatched with the message, but quickly returned with the intelligence that the Abbess did not require the attendance of the reverend Father, but desired that his *eccellenza* would immediately appear before her.

"Appear before her!—boy, these could not be her words."

"Inform the reverend Confessor, that I have no need of him—and your master, young boy, that I desire he will appear before me."

The page recited this message in a tone so ludicrously pompous, and drew up his diminutive person with so much comic dignity, that Father Laurence laughed outright.

"This is no time for jesting, boy—speak the message as it was given you."

"I would, my lord, that you had seen the holy lady as she came out of her oratory to speak to me. She was as pale as our statue of the virgin—and it was plain she had been weep-

ing. Truly, I saw no cause for jesting—but she gave me the message as I have given it to you.”

“Go to her, my son,” said Father Laurence, “go to her without delay—these tears show womanly and hopeful, and should she, my son, be less gentle in manner, than to so excellent a brother she ought—remember—that she is the powerful Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s.”

Thus schooled, the Count stalked off—but the rebellion which raged at his heart, was not very successfully concealed by his countenance.

Morgante had informed him that the Abbess was no longer in the parlour, but had retired to her own apartment; it was to this room, therefore, that he repaired, and was surprised, on entering, to find it empty. On looking across it and through an opposite door, which was that of the closet prepared as an oratory, the Count saw her kneeling before the little altar. Father Anselmo, her Confessor, who was standing before her, appeared to be pronouncing either a blessing or an absolution, for his hands were raised,

and spread over her head. The Count started, and retired hastily, closing the door after him; and, perhaps, not sorry to have so good a pretext for avoiding an immediate renewal of conversation with his imperious sister.

He had not, however, proceeded many steps from the door, when the Confessor overtook him.

“The reverend lady is alone, my lord, and ready to receive you,” said the gentle Father Anselmo, as he stood respectfully aside to let the Count pass him.

No farther hope of escape remained, and the vexed nobleman turned, and entered the room.

The Abbess was seated at a table, with a book of religious exercises before her; her veil fell so much over her face, as almost entirely to conceal her features; but even so, the quiet dignity of her figure, and the graceful repose of her attitude, were imposing. By some caprice of feeling, her brother was now as much disconcerted by finding her countenance hid from him, as he had lately been by the difficulty of avoiding to look at it.

Her first words were—"Be seated, Sir," and the mortified Count, though he certainly had never thought of remaining standing before her, sat down on the chair to which she pointed, as if in doing so, he committed a sin of presumption.

Some strong emotion seemed to shake the frame of the Abbess; at length she said—

"Never again, Theodore, as you value your peace here, or your eternal repose hereafter, trust yourself to pronounce the name of my most honoured mother. Never more will you hear it from my lips."

A silence of some minutes followed these words, after which, throwing back her veil, and showing a countenance on which strong traces of suffering, but no signs of anger remained, she proceeded.

"For twenty years—brother," (the word seemed to cost an effort), "for twenty years, I have been a stranger to my father's roof; but though duty obliges me to call another spot my home, I still feel the ties of kindred pressing closely round me. My destiny has forbidden

me to know the feelings of a mother, but the love I could bear your Juliet, would not, I think, be far unlike it. And your sweet boy too—you are happy, Theodore, in having such gentle and engaging creatures always near you.”

Under the existing circumstances, this was by no means an easy speech to answer; but it was necessary to say something, so after a little hesitation, the Count d’Albano asked his sister, if she did ~~not~~ think the young Ferdinand, extremely like what he was when a boy.

“ I think he is:—you can hardly imagine, brother, remembering as you must my long estrangement from you, what deep and tender interest I take in the happiness of your sweet Juliet: she would be a rich and lovely gem in the coronet of the proudest noble of this, or any other land.”

Had there been less of pressing necessity in the Count’s decision respecting his daughter, he perhaps would hardly have found courage to retain his purpose, thus decidedly opposed by one of whom he stood so much in awe; but,

like all other embarrassed people who hit upon an expedient promising relief, he had persuaded himself, that Juliet once fairly a nun, all his difficulties would vanish. It was this gave him courage to say—

“You seem to mistake my purpose for her, sister Geraldine.—My daughter is intended for the cloister.”

“Bethink you well, Theodore, before you so decide. Juliet has many years of life before her, and the sentence which costs you so little to pronounce, must be sustained by her, through weary years of heart-sick hopelessness.”

“Is it the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s,” said the Count in unfeigned astonishment, “who uses this language when speaking of the sacred cloister?”

“None but herself, Theodore, could love your child so well, as to forget all else, when thinking of her happiness. Look out, dear brother,” she continued, rising from her chair, and leading him by the hand through the open window into the balcony—“Look on the scene

where this young creature has learnt to taste of life—such as God gives it—The bright sunshine, the delicious shade, the bounteous pastures, the majestic sea—and then this fragrant world of flowers—of all this, Juliet has been queen. I met her this morning among her gay parterres the fresh air of morning playing in her hair—youth, hope, and freedom glancing from her eye———Oh, brother, do not quench that bright young eye! Oh! do not——”

So deeply interested was the Abbess in the cause she was pleading, that her earnestness was perhaps greater than prudence warranted. The Count was not slow to perceive this, and resuming his courage, he said:—

“I pray you, sister Geraldine, to tell me, if these be the doctrines of the church, respecting the dedication of young maidens to the cloister?—My purpose was most holy, but if it be thus, I must submit.—Yet first, I will be assured, that so it is at Rome. Excuse me if I leave you; I must forthwith dispatch a messenger to the Holy See. It may be that the heresy of England has

prevailed.—I must know more of this.” “Stay, impious man!” exclaimed the Abbess with an emphasis that made him tremble, “Hear me! and learn to fear the God that gives me power to read the heart.—Your purpose—holy? Hear me rehearse it, sir.—To save your sordid gold, you would profane the altar and the word of God—you would force within the sacred troop of heaven-devoted maids, a poor young girl, who has no call from Christ.—I have but to record this charge against you in that tremendous court where sacrilege receives its earthly judgment—and you should quickly be, where lingering for years you might atone for it,—aye—in the deepest dungeons of the Inquisition.”

Perfectly astounded, mastered, and overpowered at his own weapons, the terrified Count stood aghast,—his eyes widely distended, and his hands raised as in deprecation of the sentence he had just heard.

“It is cruel, sir—it is impious. Yet still you are my brother—Do not rashly labour to make me forget this tie. Retire to your chamber,

Theodore, and when next we meet, I trust to find you in a better frame of mind."

Humbled to the dust, the Count again left the presence of his haughty sister. As he went, his head throbbing with passion, hatred curdling at his heart, and vague but burning hopes of vengeance brooding within him, he cursed the evil hour that had brought her to his castle.

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CHAPTER X.

————— io mi riscossi
Come persona che per forza è desta.

DANTE.

JULIET, meanwhile, was still enjoying a degree of pleasure at the idea of having found a friend, which only one so desolate could know. She loved her little brother, she loved her kind and grateful page, but a friend—and that a woman too—one who could advise her, lead her,—this she had never known till now. Again and again she repeated to herself the words—“In private, Juliet, never fear me more,” and the one little treasured secret, which lay at the bottom of her heart, became so painful, that she almost determined to tell this dear aunt all.

One wild and strange adventure had alone interrupted the even tenour of her life, and though the impression it had made upon her heart and fancy was great, that produced by the interview of the morning was scarcely less so.

“Yes, she shall know it all,” was the conclusion to which she finally came. “No reserve of mine, shall poison so sweet an intercourse.”

Soon after she had made this resolution, one of the nuns, conducted to her chamber by Olive, entered, and in reply to Juliet’s civil request that she would sit down, said, “Not so, my dear child, I come to lead you to the presence of the Lady Abbess.”

On hearing this most welcome mandate, Juliet sprang to the door, and totally forgetting the messenger, in her eagerness to obey the message, had already run half down the gallery, when the voice of Olive stopped her.

Had Juliet been less absorbed, she must have been amused by the whimsical look of surprise, mixed with no small portion of mortification,

which her maid's countenance betrayed. It is certain, that this most catholic of chambermaids had anticipated a very different result from the introduction of herself and her mistress to the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's. On the part of the young lady, she had expected to witness shyness, fear, and dislike; while she anticipated that her own share of the drama would have been, confidential familiarity on the part of the noble recluse, and a judicious display of piety and importance on her own.

The very contrary of all this, however, had ensued. She was by no means sure that the visual organs of the Abbess had as yet conveyed any consciousness of her image to that holy lady's sensorium, while it was sufficiently evident to the sharp-sighted Abigail, that Juliet already loved, and was fondly beloved by, her aunt.

She now called to her, in a voice of some authority:—

“Signora! Signora Juliet! What will the Lady Abbess say, if you treat one of her holy

nuns in this manner? If she had sent a dog to call you, it could hardly have been treated with less respect."

"I beg your pardon, sister Beatrice," said Juliet, stepping back, and kindly taking the recluse by the hand—"indeed, I meant no rudeness. My aunt is in her own apartment,—is she not?"

"Yes, Signora," answered the nun solemnly, "but it will be proper for me to announce to her that you are coming."

"Do so, then, good sister," said Juliet gently, while she restrained her steps to keep pace with the measured movement of the nun. There was something chilling to the glow at her heart, in this formal manner of being ushered to the presence of her friend; but fortunately, she remembered her injunction, "Let me be still the Abbess for you in public;" and, immediately assuming an air as grave as that of her conductor, she remained at the door of her aunt's room, while sister Beatrice entered it, and when, a moment after, she returned to inform her that she

might approach, Juliet did so, as demurely as Olive herself could have desired.

Sister Beatrice remained for a moment with the door in her hand, waiting, perhaps, to see how this favoured niece should be received; but Juliet did not forget her lesson; and not only walked across the large room without quickening her pace, but on reaching her aunt's footstool, kneeled down upon it, to receive a blessing with all possible decorum. She then heard the door close, and looking up, saw in the smile that succeeded to the solemnity of look which greeted her entrance, that no one remained to watch them. But she still continued kneeling, and fondly pressed the hand that would have raised her, between her own, while looking playfully round the room, she said,—

“Are you sure no one can see your spoiled niece?”

“Quite sure, dear Juliet.”

“Then take off your veil, and your hood, and let me see my own dear aunt again.”

The Abbess indulged her; she even took a bright coloured scarf from the shoulders of Juliet, and throwing it over her own, contrived to twist it round her person, so as completely to change the appearance of her dress. Then laying her large cross and rosary upon the table, she said—

“Where is the Abbess now, Juliet?—Forget her totally—and let us converse together like friends. Do you think that you shall have sufficient courage to be perfectly sincere with me?”

“Yes, I do think so.”

“Well then—tell me at once, whom you love best in all the world?”

“Yourself—decidedly yourself,” answered Juliet; and she spoke the truth; though the recollection, that there was one who might reproach her for it, dyed her cheeks with blushes.

“I do believe you—but trust me wholly, Juliet—Is there not some youthful fancy, which has already touched your heart; and which, well as you love me, would make the cloister most repugnant to you?”

There is certainly an instinctive shyness, which renders the avowal of first love singularly difficult; for though Juliet had come with the full determination of making this very avowal, it was not without a struggle that she accomplished it. After the interval of a moment, however, she replied—

“ My aunt, there is.”

“ Juliet !” replied the Abbess, “ I was before well disposed to give you my true friendship, and my perfect confidence; but now you have won them; they are yours by right——. And the first fruits of your acquisition shall be, the assurance that you shall never be a nun.”

No very exquisite degree of happiness can be enjoyed by mortals, unless they have previously felt some touch of sorrow. A landscape that had no shadows, could never make us conscious of the glorious brightness of sunshine; and had Juliet never suffered from believing herself doomed to the cloister, she could not have felt the fullness of joy which these words occasioned her. For a moment her aunt enjoyed in silence

the demonstrations of her delight: words had but little share in the expression of it; but the hands clasped in thankfulness, the eyes first raised to Heaven, and then bent upon her benefactress, the smile that was seen, not on the lips alone, but beaming over all her blushing face, spoke plainly enough, without the aid of any other language.

The Abbess herself looked hardly less delighted; “Now tell me, then, this love tale, Juliet.”

“Yes,” replied Juliet, “I will tell it—though I would give much that you could know it all, without my speaking it.”

“And why so? Depend upon it, I should not listen to it with so much indulgence from any other lips.”

“Indulgence! Then you know it wants indulgence? Indeed it does—but how do you know this?”

The Abbess laughed. “I believe, Juliet, that you are half afraid that I shall turn out to be little better than a witch—tell me, do you not

suspect that there is something rather magical in my way of making discoveries?"

"I certainly should like to know," replied Juliet, gravely, "how you came to find out that I was not at vespers last evening."

"Be not alarmed, dearest. If it was a spirit told me, it was no evil one."

"Then you will not tell me?"

"Remember you stand pledged to put me completely in your confidence. Is it by questioning me, that you mean to do this?"

Juliet sighed. "No.—I will keep my word, and tell you every thing—but it is so silly a story—so very childish—and, I fear, so very wrong too, that I shall have need of all the indulgence you promised me."

"And you shall have it, Juliet.—Of course the youth is noble?"

The burning blush which overspread the face of her niece at this question, would have alarmed most aunts; but Geraldine d'Albano appeared to judge every thing by a standard entirely her own, and her countenance expressed neither

alarm nor indignation at this tacit avowal of all a noble lady would most dislike to discover on such an occasion. Juliet observed this, but seemed more puzzled than consoled by it.

“ You suspect that he is not noble ?” said the Abbess, after waiting in vain for an answer, “ Has he told you ~~this~~ ?—or have you discovered it from his plebeian air ?”

The answer was now sufficiently ready.

“ Plebeian ! oh, no ! he is, he must be, noble. But, alas !” and Juliet turned away her head as she spoke, “ I know neither his name—his country—nor his kindred !”

“ This certainly does not appear to be a particularly well conducted affair, my dear Juliet ; but, nevertheless, you need not be afraid to look at me. Go on—tell me how, and where, you first met this unknown hero.”

There was certainly no anger in the accent with which these words were spoken ; yet Juliet was so perverse as almost to wish there had been.

“ I wish, aunt, you would absolve me from

my promise," she said. "I see you think me a baby and a fool——and yet——"

"And yet?——yet what, Juliet? What have I said to vex you?"

"Nothing——yet I see so plainly——"

"Pray, my dear, are you endeavouring to try how far my power of divination will carry me? You overrate it, if you think these half sentences will ever enable me to comprehend what you have promised to tell me."

Greatly, yet, as she felt, unreasonably vexed, at the light tone, which her aunt had given to the conversation, Juliet had no heart to proceed with her little romance, and attempted to avoid it, by saying—

"I believe you already know every thing that is really important about this imprudent attachment—I show all the confidence I promised you, my dear aunt, in allowing this. That it is imprudent, my ignorance respecting its object but too clearly proves; but that it is equally sincere and lasting, I am far from desiring to conceal—believe it to be both—and

you will then know all that it is in my power to tell you respecting it."

"Pardon me, dearest Juliet, if my manner has wounded you—but you have not well understood me, if you think the subject not sufficiently interesting—it is at least twice as much so, as you could possibly have imagined when you first promised to communicate it to me. Omit ^{not} a single circumstance—describe the person, the manner, the sentiments of this young man to me, and do not fear that I shall not be sufficiently interested."

Juliet still felt puzzled—but she felt also, that she must go on with her story, and with the best grace she could, she thus resumed it:—

"I feel very certain that no partiality blinds me, when I say that he——this nameless he——has no churl's blood in his veins; for before I felt any thing but surprise and almost terror at the sight of him, I was strongly impressed with the conviction, that he was a young man of high rank."

"He speaks your language, Juliet?"

“ Yes, he speaks it with ease and grace enough, yet not so well as to prevent one’s knowing that it is not his own.”

“ Describe his person, Juliet ?”

Juliet blushed, and fixing her eyes on the face of her aunt, she said with a smile :

“ Do not think that it was the reason why I so directly felt I loved you ; but, excepting that his hair is lighter, and that he is not so pale, you are very like him yourself.”

“ Indeed, Juliet ! when did you first take that fancy into your head ?”

“ When you first smiled on me.”

“ He is like me when he smiles then ?”

“ Most strangely like you : the shape of the face, the nose, and more than all, the mouth. To prove to you, that it is no fancy of mine, Morgante too remarked it.”

“ Then if I mistake not, Juliet, he must also somewhat resemble you ?”

“ So said Morgante, the first day we saw him ; but I thought it only a jest, till I saw you ; but now I believe it may be possible.”

This conversation was so interesting, both to the aunt and niece, that it continued rambling on, between narration and remark, too long for us to follow them in it; the circumstances attending Juliet's first meeting with her mysterious lover shall, therefore, be related more succinctly.

It was about two months before the arrival of the Abbess at the castle of Albano, that Juliet and her constant attendant, the little page, were enjoying the flowery sweetness of an April morning, under the shelter of the chesnut tree already mentioned. Juliet was seated on the turf beside the little rivulet that ran at its foot, and the boy had brought her his cap full of flowers, which she was twisting into a wreath, when an exclamation from Morgante caused her to look up. Equally to her astonishment and alarm, she saw a young man in the dress of a hunter, standing almost close to her. He was looking at her with great earnestness, and on her raising her eyes, he took off his plumed bonnet, and bowed low.

Juliet immediately arose, with the intention of returning to the castle, but the young man stopped her, by suddenly taking her hand. Though there was an air of much respect in this action, there was also much freedom in it, and the young lady said with sufficient hauteur to have satisfied even her father :

“ Let me pass, sir.”

“ Juliet d’Albano ?” said the stranger, in an accent that was half inquiry, and half assertion—

“ If you know as much, sir,” said her ready-page, “ I marvel that you should seek to detain her.”

“ It is because I do know so much, Lady Juliet,” resumed the young man, “ that I take this liberty. I have waited here since sun-rise, in the hope of seeing you, for they told me in the village, that it was your custom to walk here.”

The frankness of this avowal might have startled any one less primitively simple in heart, but Juliet was more struck by the grace and courtesy of his address, than by the strange

confession, that he had approached thus near to her father's castle expressly to way-lay her. Her surprise, or at least her alarm, seemed already to have passed over, and it was very nearly with a smile that she answered :

“ I am sorry, sir, that you should have taken so much trouble.”

As the recapitulation of this adventure is not intended to occupy much space, we must pass over the stages which led by rapid and unmarked degrees, from the apparently casual meetings which after this day took place whenever Juliet pursued her usual walk, to the asked and granted rendezvous, in which love was spoken, listened to, and finally confirmed by mutual vows.

The most singular feature in this intercourse was the pertinacity with which the young stranger refused to tell his name or country ; and, above all, the vehemence with which he rejected a proposal that she made, for his introducing himself, as if by accident, to her father. The very mention of this threw a gloom and

reserve over his manner, which it cost Juliet some smiles to remove, and it was never repeated. For more than a month these woodland meetings continued daily; and before the end of it, Juliet was as firmly engaged to become his wife, as her own promise could make her. He owned to her that obstacles existed; that he was not his own master; that his home was a distant one; but nothing of all this had power to check either their love, or the avowal of it.

At the expiration of this month, business which could no longer be delayed, obliged the young man to repair to Germany; but their parting was rendered easy by the assurance that they should speedily meet again. Accordingly, about a fortnight afterwards the same swift light bark which conveyed him to Trieste, was again seen making for the little harbour of Torre Vecchia.

On this occasion he remained but two days, and one object of his visit seemed to be the making accurate inquiry as to the exact time at which Juliet's aunt was expected at Albano.

This was given with cautious exactness, from her supposing that his object was most carefully to avoid that time, when he should come for the last interview, as he told her, previous to his return to his own distant land. Once arrived there, he persuaded both himself and her, that none of the obstacles to their union which, he confessed, existed, would long withstand the earnest ~~endeavours~~ endeavours of the ardent love which would seek to remove them.

“And when do you meet again?” said the Abbess, when the tale was ended.

“He told me yesterday ——” Juliet stopped short.

“Well, Juliet,” said the Abbess, smiling, “yesterday, while we were all at vespers——.”

“Even so,” said the blushing girl, struggling to recover her composure, “it was then I saw him last, and it was then we settled to meet again to-day, at the same hour.”

“It is well, my love; and if you have no objection, I will attend you to this appointment.”

From the moment that Geraldine d'Albano arrived at the castle, to that in which she made this most astounding proposal, the mind of Juliet had undergone what might fairly be called a course of astonishment, but this last far exceeded all that had preceded it.

That she should have been led, by any change of feeling, voluntarily to communicate the treasured secret of her heart to the relative at whose name she had shuddered but a few short hours before, was in itself so wonderful, as almost to make her doubt the reality of the scene that was passing around her; but when she heard the high, the holy, the exemplary, the severe Abbess of Sant' Catherina's propose accompanying her to a rendezvous with her lover, under the greenwood tree, her astonishment was uncontrollable, and she exclaimed—

“ Good heaven ! what can you mean ? ”

These words, however, were no sooner uttered, than she repented of their freedom, and apologized for it on her bended knee.

“ Do not kneel to me, Juliet ;—you must

never more do that—it is painful to me. I forgive you freely for your hasty words; they were very natural; yet I must go with you this evening, Juliet, however strange my doing so may appear to you.”

Her niece dutifully endeavoured to banish all expression of wonder, even from her eyes, and answered meekly—

“As you please, aunt.”

“I do not like that ‘as you please, aunt,’ at all, Juliet; and, were there not weighty reasons for the contrary, I would not go with you.”

This was spoken in accents of such affectionate reproach, that Juliet’s heart immediately softened, and again feeling all the confidence of friendship, she said—

“But what will he think of it? He was most anxious not to be seen by my family; will it not seem that I have betrayed him?”

It was with the same extraordinary smile, so difficult to understand, and so impossible to resist, that the Abbess replied—

“ No, Juliet, he will not.”

And so the conversation ended. The dinner-bell was heard, and the ladies descended with the usual ceremonies to the hall.

CHAPTER XI.

When the devout religion of mine eye
Maintains such falsehood, then turn tears to fires.

SHAKSPEARE.

It is impossible, by any description, to do justice to the rage and disappointment of the Count on quitting for the second time the presence of his sister. He shrank from avowing, even to his good-hearted confessor, the deep mortification he had received; he shut himself up alone in his library, and remained there till he could bear its sombre solitude no longer; then, vainly seeking relief from change of place, he walked out upon the terrace, his proud step changed for a fretful shuffle. The light of day seemed to affront him, and half closing his eyes, he walked on, lashing

his spirit almost to madness by recapitulating his wrongs. Bearded in his own castle—threatened—trampled on—insulted. His poverty suspected—his piety converted to a crime—and his will, his just, holy, and lawful will, as to the disposal of his daughter, disputed and condemned. Must this be borne? Was no revenge within his reach? As he again and again asked himself the question, something within him seemed to answer it; but so wildly, that again and again he turned from the answer, and repeated the question. Yet still the strange and awful words, “ACCUSE HER OF HERESY,” returned upon his mind. If he pursued his walk with his eyes moodily fixed upon the ground, “ACCUSE HER OF HERESY,” seemed written upon the gravel. If he looked up and saw myriads of summer flies dancing in chequered maze before him, “ACCUSE HER OF HERESY,” was traced on the air by their wings.

“I dare not think of it,” he exclaimed aloud; “she is the glory of our house!”

At that moment a large sea-bird flitted by

above his head. Just as it passed him, it dipped heavily towards the earth, and screamed. The hoarse note, to his ear, distinctly sounded "HERESY," and now he no longer doubted, or, at least, he no longer thought it proper to doubt, that he had been visited by a miracle.

Elevated and excited, he re-entered the castle, and proceeding directly to his chamber, he bedewed himself with holy water, and then, falling on his knees before the wooden crucifix which was placed in the room, he vowed, as he kissed the feet of the image, that the command which had been so miraculously conveyed to him, should be obeyed.

Having very satisfactorily performed this act of devotion, he arose from his knees much comforted, and summoning a domestic, he again sent to seek his confessor.

The priest came to him without delay, though he was not unpleasantly engaged, being at that moment employed in eating a slight refection of dry fruits, and wafer bread, in the closet appropriated to the keeping such dainty stores. To

these, the pious and attentive Olive had added the remnant of a flask of wine; while she was rewarded by receiving, in return, much good advice, together with some spiritual observations concerning the demeanour of the Lady Abbess's retinue.

"I know not, Olive," said the monk, as he washed down his raisins of the sun with a draught of Rhenish, "and in good truth, I cannot understand, how so great and godly a lady can tolerate such a crew of ill-favoured and unholy fellows. Remember, Olive, if I am pitiful to your youth, and the weakness of your female nature, you must not abuse my indulgence. There are sins, pretty Olive, I could hardly give you absolution for."

Here Olive interrupted him, with an assurance that she was in no danger of committing any faults in consequence of the new arrivals, and just as he was listening, well pleased, to her promises of perfect discretion, the door of the closet opened, and a serving-man appeared with the message above-mentioned.

No sooner had Father Laurence entered the room where the Count waited for him, than he perceived that something extraordinary had occurred. The vexed and fretful expression of countenance, with which he had left him, two hours before, to obey the summons of the Abbess, had entirely vanished, and in its place appeared a look of settled solemnity.

“What’s in the wind now?” said the monk, internally, as he approached the table at which the Count was sitting, with a step, whose measured gravity was in nice accordance with the apparent state of his patron’s mind.

“Sit down, Father,” said the Count. The confessor obeyed, and though pretty well accustomed to pompous nothings, uttered with majestic gravity, the tone of voice in which he was now addressed almost startled him.

“I have sent for you, Father Laurence,” began the Count, “to communicate to you an event, the importance of which can only be

equalled by the wonderful circumstances attending it."

He paused—and the confessor bowed his head. "Father! I have been visited by a miracle."

The monk started, with half real, half affected surprise, but said nothing; knowing that the most agreeable answer would be the look of eager, yet solemn curiosity, which he immediately assumed.

"It is even so," continued the Count, "and what are all the glories obtained by my ancestors compared to this! Theodore is the only Count d'Albano on record, holy Father, to whom this mark of Heaven's favour has been accorded."

"Then may we be certain, my son, that it is this Theodore, who has been found the most deserving of it. But proceed, my lord—if, indeed, you are permitted to reveal the miracle to mortal ears."

"Of that you shall yourself be judge. To

you, as my spiritual guide, I must, of course, first apply for counsel, on this solemn occasion."

"My son," replied the monk, with humility, "I have ever found you so wise and just a judge of your own actions, that I should advise you, in this, as in all other circumstances, to be governed solely by your own will and pleasure."

"Not so, Father,—not so. On this occasion, it is you, who must interpret the signs and wonders that have been shown to me—and, may the God, whose servant you are, inspire you with wisdom to direct me right!"

The sharp-witted monk felt convinced, that there was some business in contemplation, for which the instrument, familiarly designated a cat's-paw, was required; and he was confirmed in this idea, when the Count added, in that dogged tone of pertinacity to which he had so long been accustomed:

"But before I proceed, I deem it best to inform you, that NOTHING can change my

opinion, as to the nature of the vision, or its purpose."

Receiving his cue from this hint, the well-disciplined Father Laurence prepared himself to hear, with patient acquiescence, whatever his illustrious penitent might chose to narrate. He drew a foot nearer to him, crossed his hands demurely on his well-rounded paunch, and assumed the air of a man about to hear of high and weighty matters.

As Count Theodore was rather lengthy in his style of narrative, we will spare the reader his account of the last interview with his sister, together with all his commentaries thereupon, and take up his narrative at the moment when the first supernatural circumstance occurred.

"I walked forth upon the terrace, Father, hoping to cool the fever which seemed to have seized upon my brain, while listening to words so awfully impious. My eyes were fixed upon the ground, and ere I had taken three steps, I saw on the walk before me, words, traced fairly

on the gravel—I saw them, Father, as clearly as I now see your rosary.”

“ Could you read the characters, my son ?”

“ Ay, Father—and their purport made me tremble.—I tremble still—but yet I must repeat them:—‘ Accuse the Abbess of heresy before the Pope.’ Such were the dreadful words I read.”

Father Laurence crossed himself.

“ Nor was this all. Amazed and terrified, I tore my eyes from the burning characters that seemed to scorch them, and turned my troubled glance towards the heavens.—What saw I there? —The air was full of summer insects, which, as you know, dance on for ever in the sunbeams, seeming always to precede our steps. These insects, Father, these light summer flies, drew up together in a darkening group, and then arranged themselves into the self-same words,—‘ Accuse her of heresy before the Pope.’ ”

“ Most wonderful !” ejaculated the confessor.

“ Now, mark the end of it.—Father, I re-

belled.—Alas ! I rebelled against the word of God !”

Again Father Laurence crossed himself, on which the Count sank on his knees before him, and concluded his narrative after the manner of a confession.

“ Yes, holy Father, I rebelled ! My impious lips exclaimed aloud, ‘ I will not think of it—she is the glory of our house.’ ”

“ Ha !” exclaimed the monk, in a voice of terror.

“ I will do penance for it, holy Father—I will do penance—even unto obeying the dreadful decree !”

A sort of queer twinkle, that at this moment moved one of the monk’s eye-lids, and which approached in a slight degree to a wink, might have indicated to an attentive observer, that he now began to understand the business before him—but it was not perceived by the noble penitent, who thus continued his story.

“ Heaven did not leave it to my own hardened heart, Father, nor even to your sanctity to

reprove me, for hardly had I uttered the sacrilegious words, when a huge bird, in size and shape unlike any ever seen before, swept down, close above my head, and, as he passed, screamed in my ear, in tones as terrible as those of the Inquisition itself,—‘ HERESY ! ’ ”

Here the Count ceased, and quite overcome by the tremendous history he had related, he covered his eyes with his hands, and dropped his head upon the knees of his confessor.

The good-hearted man, though he did not give credit to a single syllable of the recital, except perhaps a temperate belief in the statement of what the Abbess had spoken, addressed his penitent with all possible indulgence.

“ Rise, my son.—You have sinned, it cannot be denied ; but your penance, as you have yourself well remarked, has been spoken by the voice of Heaven. My duty is, questionless, to confirm this, and to assist you, as best I may, in the performance of it. Rise, my son. You have important business before you.”

“I cannot rise, holy Father, till you have granted me absolution for the sin I have committed.—Grant me absolution, holy Father, for all the sins resting upon my conscience since my last confession—though now my mind is too much agitated to record them.”

“Some small benefaction to the church, my son, will be necessary for this. Candles must burn before the shrine of your blessed patron, St. Theodose, and six extra masses must be said.”

The Count sighed, for at that moment his purse was very low; the preparations for the reception of his illustrious sister, having drawn deeply on it. He reflected for a moment; and then taking a rosary of small gold beads from his bosom, he said—

“Lay this before the image of St. Theodose, Father. A string of ivory shall serve me, while this woeful penance is about. If Heaven give me strength to go through it, I will redeem my pledge by twice its weight of golden coin.”

Father Laurence then pronounced the abso-

lution, and the Count arose, lightened of a heavy load.

Nothing, perhaps, can give a better idea of the deep interest which both penitent and confessor took in the business which had engaged them, than the fact that the great bell had sounded the hour of dinner, without either of them having been aware of it. This was the first time since Father Laurence had resided in the castle, that such an accident had happened, and it was likely to be the last, for when a servant, sent by Juliet, entered the room, and announced the fact, so strong an emotion of regret, repentance, nay, almost remorse, fell upon his spirit, as he thought of the chilled meats, that it was not likely he would ever forget it.

On reaching the hall, they found the family assembled, and the Count hastened with much bustle to his place.

So much stiff and stately ceremony pervaded the banquets at Albano, that the increased solemnity of the Count's manner upon this occasion was hardly perceptible; yet still the

silence was more complete than usual; even Morgante held his station gravely, and seemed to feel that it was no season for mirth. Father Laurence, though he ate heartily, did it reverently, and no more words were spoken by any of the family, than were necessary to the performance of the common rites of hospitality towards the guests.

CHAPTER XII.

Qual è colui, ch' ha presso 'l riprezzo
Della quartana, ch' ha gia l'unghia smorte,
Tal divenn' io alle parole porte ;
Ma vergogna mi fer le sue minacci,
Che 'nnanzi a buon signor fa servo forte.

DANTE.

It was not the custom of Father Laurence to make any great exertion, either mental or bodily, for the first two or three hours after dinner; when the Count, therefore, laid his hand on his arm, as he walked down the hall, and requested his attendance, the monk felt exceedingly disposed to excuse himself; but either his wit failed him, or he was too well aware of the difficulty of making his escape at this moment, to attempt it; so, bending his head

with resignation, he meekly followed to the library. The chairs of this apartment were singularly comfortable, having been constructed after the directions of a certain Cardinal d'Albano, who took the pattern from those of the Pope's private library in the Vatican. In one of these chairs Father Laurence placed himself, and prepared to listen, either to a repetition of the morning's tale, or to a perennial flow of commentary on it. Nothing like it, however, followed. The little fiddling, dawdling, repetitive strain, in which the Count d'Albano usually indulged, was now changed to a tone of vehement activity, and eagerness for action.

“How is this awful business to begin, Father?”

It was thus he addressed the monk before they were both well seated.

“I will have no delay, lest the monster, sent by the just vengeance of Heaven to admonish me, should again come to scream in my ear, that most appalling of all articulate sounds, ‘HERESY.’—Speak! What must be the plan of our proceedings?”

“ You have been, so far, Heaven-directed in this business, my son, that I would rather listen to your suggestions, before I propound my own. Go on then, my lord—speak freely and at length, whatever has come into your head, respecting this terrible, but doubtless most necessary, business. Your talents, backed by the aid of Heaven, cannot fail to direct us right. I shall hear you to the end, before I make a single remark.”

That the Count's mind was at this moment more pregnant than usual, was certainly true. Vengeance, ambition, and a burning desire to distinguish himself by religious zeal, were all busily at work within him; and firmly persuaded that the unusual activity he felt, was an impulse from Heaven, he set himself to obey the confessor's behest; and was presently deep in a long-winded dissertation on the abominations of the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, the purity of his own motives in bringing them to light, and the necessity of making his holiness the Pope

speedily to understand the danger which threatened the church from within its sacred walls.

He had not pursued his discourse for more than three minutes before Father Laurence was most comfortably and profoundly asleep in the soft depth of his huge arm chair; but it was long ere the Count was aware of it.

Carried on by the unusual energy of his feelings, he talked, and talked on, nothing doubting the attention of the monk, whose closed eyes and perfect stillness he interpreted as signs of earnest listening. At length the unfortunate confessor gave a most violent snort, followed by the indescribable cadence which announces hearty snoring.

“ Good Heaven!—Is it possible?—Asleep! My confessor asleep at this, the most important moment of my life?——Awake, Sir Priest! awake!” shouted the enraged nobleman, seizing him by the arm, and shaking him violently—
“ Awake! for the last time beneath my roof.”

The thundering tone of voice, aided by as

strong a gripe as the delicate arm of his patron could give, effectually roused the sleeping man; he started upon his feet, and for a moment looked wildly upon his assailant; but the repetition of the word "asleep!" in an accent of the most direful anger, at once explained the assault, and at the same instant showed him the peril in which he stood.

The genius of his calling befriended him. He seized in his turn upon the Count, and holding him off, at the full length of his muscular arm, he exclaimed—

"Sleep!—Sleep!—Call you that sleep?—A vision has been upon me, my dear son.—Let me recover myself—our forward path is clear; but I must meditate awhile."

Instantly yielding belief to a statement so congenial to all his own notions, the Count testified, with the most penitent humility, the shame he felt for his sacrilegious mistake.

"It matters not, my son, it is forgiven; nothing matters now, but the arresting the thoughts which are driving through my brain.

Ask me no questions; not yet can I impart what has been borne in upon my spirit.—Let me retire, my son; I have need to be alone.”

With awe the most reverential, and respect the most profound, the Count opened the door for the holy man to pass, and was well satisfied, when a slight bend of the head, as he went out, showed that he did not consider him as altogether beneath his notice.

When he had proceeded a few steps into the passage, the monk turned round, and standing still, beckoned the Count, who continued at the door, to approach him. He did so with an eager step.

“Dispatch a courier instantly to my convent. He shall bear a letter from me to Father Dominic, beseeching his immediate attendance here; he will officiate at vespers! I must remain for some hours alone.”

“Is it your purpose, holy Father, to communicate to your friend the business in hand?”

“It is possible we may need his aid.—Of his counsel I shall assuredly avail myself when

the evening service is ended. After we have met, what next must follow shall be made known to you."

Without waiting for a reply, he turned again, and continued his progress towards his own apartment.

His commands were obeyed with the utmost promptitude, and the messenger was announced as ready, before Father Laurence had finished his epistle.

In truth, the good Father, though well satisfied with the success of the expedient by which he had not only escaped the peril into which his ill-timed nap had thrown him, but turned it into a source of glory, honour, and authority, was, nevertheless, considerably puzzled by the predicament in which he stood.

It was perfectly clear that the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's could never atone to him for the loss of his patron's favour, including, as it must, that of the soft tranquillity of his functions in the castle, even if she had testified the utmost admiration of his sanctity. It was, therefore,

quite impossible that a man of his goodness of heart could doubt for a moment whose side he should espouse in the strife which seemed arising between them. Yet still his path was far from straight. Not one syllable, as we have said, did he credit of the wonderful story related by the Count. Romish priests have, perhaps, in all ages of the Church, been less liable to superstition than other men.

Those who are behind the scenes can hardly deem the machinery miraculous ; but from whatever cause, the fact is certain, that Father Laurence was as little likely to believe such a statement, as Voltaire himself would have been somewhat more than a century later. It was not, therefore, from any doubts or misgivings as to the truth or falsehood of the accusation to be laid against the exalted lady, that he felt embarrassed ; but solely from the difficulty of proceeding without, on one side, running the risk of offending his invaluable patron, or of getting himself entangled in an absurd accusation on the other.

His opinion of the Abbess was much of the same texture and complexion as that generally entertained by the clergy of the Romish Church respecting each other. They all know, that each and every one of the body must, of necessity, sanction innumerable lies; and though the varieties in every other characteristic may be as numerous as the individuals who compose it, still this ground-work gives a tincture to their mutual feelings, which, spite of a pretty strong esprit de corps, has but little of that trust and confidence, which forms a strong bond of union among the clergy of the Reformed Church. But this is quite compatible with admiration for superior learning, esteem for individual good conduct, and affection for amiable qualities.

Accordingly, Father Laurence really did feel, and was perfectly ready to express, much admiration of the high character accorded to the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's by the public voice; but, nevertheless, he doubted not that some plot, or scheme of her own, lay beneath the

imposing manner she assumed towards her brother; and as it was certain that in these, her schemes, he could have no share, while it was equally so, that whatever benefitted his patron, was very likely to benefit himself also, he felt a sufficiently strong desire to circumvent the one and assist the other. All this was clear enough, and ran through his brain, along some nerve particularly connected with self-love, as rapidly as lightning along a wire conductor. But how was he to act? If he did not believe in Romish miracles, he did most stedfastly in Romish power, and the bare idea of doing any thing which might direct its hostility against himself, gave him an ague fit. The uncertain pen was still between his fingers, having hitherto traced no characters of more definite meaning than "To the worthy and well-beloved Fra' Dominic, greeting," when a knock at the door of his room was followed by the announcement, that the courier was ready, and only waited for his orders.

It should seem that the good genius of Father

Laurence was, on this important day, actively on the watch to befriend him, for it suddenly occurred to him, that having once put Father Dominic in possession of the Count's confidence, it would be by no means difficult to withdraw himself gently from all responsibility in the business.—This bright idea at once decided his line of conduct, and with a ready pen, he requested the immediate presence of his holy brother, but without giving any particular reason for desiring his company.

The long summer afternoon was wearing away, and the hour for the vesper service arrived, but Father Dominic did not appear. The servant who had been sent for him was returned, and on being questioned by Father Laurence, stated, that the porter, who was an old acquaintance, had detained him for a few brief moments, during which he had seen the Father Dominic ride forward.

“As he passed the porter's lodge,” continued the envoy, “he desired me to refresh myself, and follow him. And that, please your holiness,

I did, before one could tell twenty ; but I have never set eyes upon his reverence since, though his mule seemed inclined for nothing beyond a gentle amble, and I have galloped all the way, as if, saving your holy presence, the devil was behind me."

There was no time for further question : the bell of the chapel had ceased, and the priest thus disappointed of a substitute, hastily prepared to perform the evening service himself. As he took his place before the altar, he raised his eyes to the gallery, where he presumed the Abbess and her nuns to be placed. The curtains were closely drawn, and the service commenced.

CHAPTER XIII.

Cette femme m'a fait donner avis de tout.

BEAUMARCHAIS.

No one had been permitted to approach Lady Geraldine since the hour of dinner. She had declined the attendance of her nuns, saying, as she dismissed them, that she should perform her evening devotions in her oratory; having announced this, she farther informed them, that they were to proceed as usual, under the guidance of Lady Juliet's page, to the gallery of the chapel.

Morgante listened with inexpressible astonishment to Juliet, when she bade him, as soon as he should have performed this duty to the

nuns, to repair to the apartment of her aunt, and conduct her to the postern door of the garden, where she herself should be in waiting to join them.

“And for the love of God, lady, whither shall you lead her?”

“To the chestnut tree,” answered Juliet, smiling.

The boy, on hearing this reply, stood silently before her, with a look of such terrified surprise, that his young mistress laughed outright.

“Oh!—I understand you now, lady—what an ass was I, to believe you in earnest!”

“But I am in earnest, Morgante—and you must be in earnest too, dear boy, and watch carefully—oh! most carefully that no one may surprise us.”

The extreme quickness of Morgante, which on ordinary occasions, enabled him to understand the orders he received before they were well uttered, now only served to confound him more completely. A thousand strange thoughts chased each other rapidly through his head;

but the simple fact that Juliet intended to introduce the green and silver hunter to the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, was still at an immeasurable distance from his comprehension.

Moments, however, were precious; Olive might enter the room before the important business was arranged; therefore, taking the boy kindly, but gravely by the hand, Juliet assured him that strange as it appeared, she had actually promised on that evening to lead her aunt to the chestnut tree.

“And the young gentleman, lady?”

“I hope to meet him there, Morgante.”

“Madre di dio!—Does the Abbess know whom she is to find there?”

“She knows every thing.”

“In the name of all the saints, who told her?”

“I did, Morgante. Do not stare so wildly, as if you thought I had lost my senses. It is only now that I have found them. Trust me, my aunt is my best and wisest friend.”

“I have read story books and romances, many

a one," answered the boy, "but never yet did I hear of any thing so wonderful, as a young lady taking a holy abbess of the church, to a private meeting with her lover, under the green-wood tree !"

"Nevertheless, be very sure, that it is true, Morgante. Fail me not now, dear boy, now, that I am doing right—you have served me faithfully in a worse cause."

"Nay, lady, you will say presently, that I did it for the love of evil, and not for love of you.—No, dear mistress, I will not fail you, now—nor ever. May the holy virgin and all the company of saints protect you, but I think you are doing what never lady did before."

"Fear nothing from my aunt——Hark ! that is Olive's steps.—Be punctual at the door, two minutes after the service has began."

This was said in a whisper, but the wonted quick glance, which had so often answered her, did so now, and she had the comfort of perceiving that, however unintelligible her motives might be, the boy understood her will, and would obey it.

“Good angels guard us, Signora!” exclaimed Olive, the moment she had opened the door—
“One might have hoped that the presence of so many good and godly people as we have now got among us, would have scared the demons away for twenty miles round, and yet Riccardo says, that it is as certain as that he is a sinner, that Father Dominic has been spirited away by some of the evil ones, whom every one knows haunt the woods between here and the Santa Croce.”

“What’s the matter now, Olive?”

This was the expected question, and the waiting maid indulged herself in reply, by narrating with much amplification the remarkable fact, that Father Dominic had set out from the monastery before Riccardo, and though he knew the way as well as from his own cell, to his own chapel, he was not yet arrived.

“Perhaps the holy father rode slowly—But pray, why was he sent for?”

“I know nothing about that—it was Father Laurence sent for him—and as for riding slow,

you know, Signora, Riccardo must have overtaken him—provided he was not arrived before him—and that for a certainty he was not.”

“He will arrive presently, I dare say,—but I should like to know why he was sent for?”

“Now is it not unaccountable, Signora, how you can think so much about that, which certainly signifies nothing at all—and yet take so little heed of the holy man’s being at the mercy of all the bad spirits that we know are perched up and down that wood yonder?”

“Well, well—perhaps he is come by this time—you had better go and see, that you may be satisfied before you go to chapel—I expect every moment to hear the bell—and then I must hasten to my aunt.”

“Shall I bring you word, Signora, to the door of the chapel gallery?”

“Not for the world, Olive!” replied Juliet, terrified,—“my aunt would be much offended.”

“Likely enough—she always looks ready to spy out faults in a poor innocent girl like me—I don’t want to come near her—not I.”

The sound of the chapel bell reached them at this moment. Olive started off, and Juliet remained listening to it as earnestly as if every stroke could tell her, how her nameless friend would receive the visitor she was about to bring him, as soon as its sound should cease.

Her anxiety upon this point was becoming painfully great—but it was too late for such thoughts either to benefit or injure her. The bell stopped, and a few minutes afterwards, the shutting of doors, and the hurrying of steps along the passages, ceased too:—every one was in the chapel, excepting the strangely assorted trio who were to meet at the garden gate.

As Juliet stepped out upon the terrace, she saw the Abbess and Morgante already at the end of it. She had hoped that her aunt would have adopted the same equivocal style of dress, which she had worn in the morning; but on the contrary, she was now fully equipped as the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's.

“Oh! what will he think of me!” mentally exclaimed Juliet, as she contemplated the stately

figure, which looked so little fitted for the scene she was to visit. But another moment brought her to the side of her aunt, and the tranquil smile with which she met her, seeming to threaten so little, and to promise so much, reassured her. The narrow path obliged them to walk singly, and by the time they had followed it half way up the opposite bank of the ravine, the terrors of Juliet returned so strongly that she stopped, and turning round to her aunt, who was immediately behind her, said :—" Will you forgive me, if I own that I am frightened at what I am doing? Let me run on, and see him for one moment, before you appear."

" As you will, dear child—I will remain under the shelter of the trees, till you return."

Juliet waited for no further parley, but hastening her steps, soon climbed the bank, passed through the little wood on its summit; and at the distance of fifty yards, saw the friend she expected, approaching to meet her.

In a few words, spoken as distinctly as her agitation would permit, she endeavoured to pre-

pare him for the unexpected meeting which awaited him. But Juliet seemed doomed to find all her calculations, conjectures, and expectations, utterly unfounded. The youth's only reply was:—

“Why does she not come with you?”

“How good this is of you!” said the innocent Juliet—“Then you do not dislike to see this dear aunt of mine?”

“I can dislike nothing, that you wish, sweet one.”

“Nay,—I wished you to see my father.”

The laughing eyes that were fixed upon her face, immediately fell.

“Where is——Where is your aunt, Juliet?”

The poor girl felt that many who would shun the seeing her father, might wish to see her aunt,—yet still she could not understand it—What could her stranger friend know of either? This was no time, however, for disentangling so intricate a knot, so after one glance of ineffectual inquiry, she turned silently away.

A few moments brought her again to the

wood, on entering which, she found the Abbess seated on a fallen tree, and the page standing at a respectful distance apart.

“ Well, Juliet—has he consented to admit my approach ?”

This was said with one of those smiles, which, though she loved to see them, Juliet could not half understand.

“ Permit ! aunt :—it was not to ask his permission that I went.”

“ Did he appear to dislike my visit ?”

“ Quite the contrary.”

“ That looks well, Juliet.—Now then, let us join him.”

They set forward together ; the little hand of Juliet pressing the arm of her companion, with an agitation she could not overcome. There was mystery in the meeting, that made her tremble ; and there was sorrow, that almost choked her :—for when should they meet again ?

Half way between the covert and the tree, where Juliet left him, they saw the young man, coming to meet them. The Abbess stopped

short, as if to look at him. He stepped eagerly forward, and in another moment bent his knee before her, kissing the hand she extended to him, with an air of the deepest respect.

While he still held her right hand, and with his eyes fixed upon her face, continued to kneel before her, she placed her left upon his shoulder, and stooping forward, kissed his forehead.

“Receive the kiss of peace, dear——son. May the universal Father bless ye both, my children !”

The young man rose ; the Abbess took his arm, and they all proceeded together towards the turf seat, which Juliet had so often occupied with her lover. The hearts of all were full, but neither of them spoke.

At length the Abbess said,—

“Juliet,—it is vain to attempt concealing from you, that I have much to say to this young man, which I would wish to say to him alone. While you are with us, my love, I cannot hope to obtain from him the undivided attention which what I have to say requires and deserves.

When must you sail ?” she continued, addressing the youth.

“ To-morrow, madam.”

As he said this, his eye glanced towards Juliet, with an expression of doubt and sadness.

“ She shall bid you farewell, Hubert—Let me call you, Hubert, sir.—I know not how to converse, without addressing my companion by some name. Let it be—Hubert—then.”

The young man coloured highly, but bowed in acquiescence.

“ Well then, Hubert, to-morrow morning at sun-rise, your——at sun-rise to-morrow, Juliet shall be here to bid you farewell. Nay—do not both look so miserable—I trust you shall meet again, when that painful word shall no longer be necessary. Now go, dear Juliet. Return to the castle with Morgante. Announce that I shall not sup in the hall. But I will see you again, my love, before I sleep.”

It would be difficult to describe the effect of the unexpected scene she had witnessed upon Juliet, or to say whether she were more vexed or

pleased.—It was very clear that she had no longer reason to fear any opposition on the part of her aunt; it was equally so, that—Hubert—as he was to be called, however much he had wished to avoid an introduction to her father, felt very differently disposed towards her aunt. She was thankful that it was so—very thankful.—But why this mystery? must it not be of *her* they had to speak? Why might she not listen to it? Occupied by these thoughts, she pursued her homeward path in silence, though her little companion, with his wonted freedom, kept close to her.

The poor child equally mortified and puzzled by the want of confidence which appeared to have succeeded the affectionate freedom with which he used to be treated, followed his mistress to the door of the garden, without having once attempted to break the unusual silence by a single word. Juliet's heart smote her when, as she turned to close it, she saw the change which *her* manner had produced on his usually merry countenance—his eyes were full of tears.

“Dear Morgante ! do not weep till you know for why—and then I perhaps may weep too—but now I can tell you nothing—for I know nothing.”

This little explanation, however, was quite sufficient to cheer the heart and the looks of the boy, as well as to unchain his tongue—and till Juliet enjoined silence, as they approached the building, by pointing to the open windows of the chapel, he ceased not to pour forth the expression of his astonishment at the scene he had just witnessed. He followed to the door of her room, where she dismissed him, with instructions to watch for the return of her aunt, and immediately to inform her of it.

Supper was, as usual, served in the hall immediately after vespers. The Abbess was not in her place ; but what was much more extraordinary, Father Laurence was not in his. The Count looked rather more proud, solemn, and cross than ordinary, and the meal passed, with even less appearance of hilarity and enjoyment than usual.

As soon as the welcome signal that it was over was given, Juliet returned to her room, and remained there, in solitude and darkness, for more than an hour. Morgante did not bring the tidings of her aunt's return, which she was so anxiously waiting for, and Olive appeared totally to have forgotten her. This excellent person was, however, employed exactly according to her mistress's wishes and commands; which were to do every thing in her power for the pleasure and accommodation of the nuns. She had, in fact, been walking with them, talking with them, and fidgetting about with them, all the day, excepting during the time that she had found it essential to the comfort of some of the male guests, that she should superintend their well-doing also, by flitting through the passages—across the kitchen—into the buttery—and out through the pantry, seen and admired by all eyes; while she employed her own in ascertaining that every thing for their entertainment was as it should be.

In truth, had it not been for Olive, this en-

vied visit to the castle d'Albano would have afforded these attendant nuns but little amusement. As it was, however, they were perfectly happy. They were listened to with the most respectful attention; and no legend which they could recite, proved too marvellous for the faith of the catholic Olive. Their viands were exactly of that light, sweet, and fanciful description which nuns of old, and modern days, best love; and their spirits were refreshed by occasional sips from the choicest corner of the cellarage; for Olive had not so long ministered to the comforts of the family confessor, without learning her way thither. Besides all this, they had the pleasure of listening, in their turn—and few chamber-maids, of any age, had a larger stock of that sort of lore which furnishes gossip than Olive. Her entrance into the parlour of the recluses was always hailed by a little clatter of welcome, especially in the evening, as they were then pretty certain that no interruption would break in upon the enjoyment she was sure to bring with her, till they were

summoned to take leave of the Abbess for the night.

“The Mother of Jesus be praised!” exclaimed sister Beatrice, as the faithful abigail entered among them as soon as supper was ended. “Here is our dear signora Olive. God bless her! If she has not brought us the very same little comforts she did last night. Come now, sit down here, just close by me.—Sister Johanna, you are rude to push so.”

“Let us have the rest of that beautiful history you began last night,” said sister Clara, coaxingly. “Dear me, sister Martha, what a noise you do make with that embroidery frame—never mind the silks—they won’t soil, just lying on the ground a little.”

Sister Martha, with the authority of seniorship, placed herself at the little table, and the rest of the party willingly obeyed the imperative—“Sit down, sisters,” which she pronounced as she did so. Olive repeated, with little variation, the hospitable cares of the night before, and while thus employed, she greatly added to the

enjoyment of the party by relating the wonderful history of Father Dominic's mysterious disappearance. A present miracle is, of all blessings, the greatest to a devotee; it at once wipes off all that mildew of torpid inaction, which their close retreat is apt to generate, and produces, instead of it, the stirring activity which is so necessary to the healthy exercise of the human mind. Every nun of them seemed to think this, a business in their own line; though it was Olive who brought the news, it was the duty of her auditors to interpret it; and they did so, with such a mixture of learning and piety, as equally astonished and delighted their secular friend.

In the midst of this delightful and instructive converse, they were interrupted by a knock at the door. It was answered by Olive, who, on opening it, found one of the inferior damsels, out of breath with her haste to communicate the intelligence that Father Dominic had arrived, and was now shut up with Father Laurence in his own room.

The four recluses were really good-tempered women; and nothing could show it plainer than the manner in which they endured this vexatious contre-tems. Not one of them but had given utterance to some theory, prophecy, or interpretation of the monk's disappearance, which this information completely overthrew; yet not one of them testified any ill-humour on the occasion; on the ~~con~~trary, they turned their heads away from the door, upon the dismissal of the messenger, with an air of meek resignation, and when sister Beatrice said—

“Well then—let us have the end of Signora Olive's story,”—they all welcomed the proposal by drawing closer round the table, and purring forth a general—“Oh yes! do now!”

“You shall have it, ladies,” replied Olive, “to the very best of my power,—and you will only wonder the more, that any Christian priest can be found to walk or ride through such a place after night-fall.”

“'Tis possible, my dear child,” said sister Johanna, “that the monks of Santa Croce, or

your own good Father Laurence, may have placed a jar of holy water at each end of the wood—that, you know, would easily explain the escape of Father Dominic.”

Olive shook her head. “You don’t know all, sister Johanna, or you would not say that. Do you think the evil one would let a jar of holy water stand where it is well known he has got permission and power to go rampaging up and down from century to century !”

“Nay, and that is true,” observed the venerable sister Martha. “It is not in such wild places as the woods round here, that holy water could avail; I am not sure, sister Johanna, if you have not said a sin in talking of holy water being set in such a place.”

Sister Johanna looked grave, and employed herself for two minutes in muttering something, during which she dropped four beads, from one side of her rosary to the other.

But the two minutes were not lost, for sister Clara whispered—

“Was Giovanni very handsome, signora?”

“To be sure he was, sister Clara,” replied the accurate historian,—“the most beautiful young gentleman that ever eyes looked upon.”

“What a pity!” exclaimed three holy voices at once.

“And was he never heard of?” inquired sister Johanna, eagerly, as she concluded her little act of penitence.

“~~That~~ That is not quite certain,” replied Olive solemnly. “Some say so—but others aver that he is still seen at intervals, now here, now there—sometimes for a moment, and sometimes long enough to make those rue, who look.”

The sign of the cross was made by all the listeners.

“And the lady that was seen with him?”—said sister Beatrice softly.

Olive put her fore-finger upon her lips, and looked at sister Martha.

“For the love of the holy virgin, tell us all you know about her, Olive,” exclaimed sister Clara. “Sister Martha is very good-natured, you need not be afraid to speak.”

Still Olive appeared to hesitate.

“Speak, my child,” said the old nun; “speak what the record tells. If there be evil in it, perchance it may serve to the weak as a warning.”

Thus sanctioned, Olive resumed her narrative, in a low voice, while the heads of her four hearers almost met together, in their anxiety not to lose a word.

“Then you must know, that what seemed a young lady —— was ——”

“Was! ——” squeaked one of the holy sisters,—“was what?”

“Was—neither more nor less, than the fiendish spirit of the devil, sent by him on purpose to seduce the poor young knight, whose faith was pledged to the Lady Madaline d’Albano.”

“Oh—h—h!” was groaned forth by all, and again they soothed their terrors by the act that sets demons at defiance.

“And what became of the poor young lady of the castle?” inquired Clara.

“She lost her wits, immediately after the

adventure I told you of last night; and they say, she made the most unaccountable noises, and said the strangest words! But the most wonderful part of her madness was, that which I am going to tell you now. She took it into her head that the little round tower, which, when it is day-light you may see peeping up over the parapet, just at the corner over the terrace; she took it into her poor head, that this little tower was her faithless lover; and she used to walk, and walk, and walk up and down the terrace talking to it, and reproaching it for all its cruelty to her."

"Poor soul!" said sister Clara, wiping her eyes.

"How long did she go on in that sad way?" inquired sister Beatrice.

"For seven long months—growing thinner and paler all the time."

"And then she died?" sobbed sister Clara.

"You shall hear. The lord her father, when he found that she still kept on fancying the little tower was her faithless lover, and that she grew worse and worse, as she went on talking to it,

and reproaching it, and calling it names, be-
thought him that it might, perhaps, give a turn
to her disorder if he could hide the little tower
from her eyes, and so he made workmen carry
up a quantity of boards, and had them nailed up
like a great screen, so that the little tower was
quite entirely hidden."

"Poor lady!" again sighed the tender-
hearted sister Clara.

"But he had much better have left it alone,"
continued Olive, "for what do you think she
did? It is quite unaccountable the sense and
cleverness of such poor mad creatures. She
watched her opportunity, when my lord and all
his followers were out hunting, and the women
folks all busy, and up she went to the highest
garret in the castle, and out she climbed, at the
window, and round she crept by the parapet,
till she got close to the screen that hid the little
tower from her love and her anger. I don't
believe it ever was known exactly, whether she
contrived to get behind the boards, but I sup-
pose she did not, and that it was her disappoint-

ment about it, which drove her to despair, for certain it is, that she threw herself off the parapet just in front of it—and when my lord came home, he found her poor young bones all smashed to pieces on the terrace.”

“ Well, I never did hear such a beautiful story of true love as that !” said sister Clara:—“ But do tell me, Olive,—did they give her Christian burial ?”

“ How can you ask such a question, sister Clara ?” said the senior recluse reproachfully.

“ For a certainty, she was buried in some dreadful place—probably in the draw-well of the castle—and doubtless she has never rested from that time to this.”

“ I meant no harm, sister Martha,” said the gentle Clara, beginning to handle her beads.

“ I believe that sister Martha is right,” resumed Olive ; “ it is pretty well known that she never has been quiet since, for——but perhaps I had better not tell that—it will make you feel uncomfortable.”

“ No, no—go on.”

“For the love of all the saints, do not stop there !”

“Well then—if you will make me speak out, the truth is, that the Lady Madaline has never ceased to haunt the room where sister Beatrice sleeps, to this day,—they say it was the room wherein the young knight slept, when he came to woo her.”

“I can’t sleep in it—I won’t sleep in it,” said the poor nun, turning dreadfully pale :—“sister Martha, speak to the Abbess for me—I am sure she won’t make me do it.”

“No, no, sister Beatrice,” replied Olive—“You need not speak to the Abbess at all about it; I will manage for you—you shall not sleep in the room again, if you don’t like it—but I thought no ghost could ever come near nuns or monks, or any of that sort of holy people.”

“Fie, sister Beatrice,” said the aged Martha, “you ought to know that, as well or better than Signora Olive.”

“Then will you change rooms with me to-night, sister Martha?”

“That would be the way to encourage you in your idle fears—say twenty credo’s over and above the rule, sister Beatrice, and you need fear nothing.”

Notwithstanding these consolatory admonitions, Olive perceived that sister Beatrice looked ill at ease, and she whispered in her ear, that she would herself arrange a little bed for her in a closet inside her own room.

This promise being received with thanks and benedictions, Olive hastened to deserve them, by preparing the little apartment with as much ceremony as the time would permit. In order to find some article which she thought would add either to the embellishment or comfort of the room, she had occasion to pass the door of that in which Father Laurence was holding his secret consultation with the monk Dominic. The ear of a chambermaid is generally thirsty for information of every kind. Olive was by no means an exception to this rule; and though she had treated the matter lightly in speaking to her mistress, she had her full share of curiosity

respecting the sudden business which had occasioned a despatch to be sent to Santa Croce for the grave and taciturn Father Dominic. Accordingly, with the licence which ladies of her profession in every country hold to be lawful, she applied her ear to the huge key-hole, and presently heard enough to make her very sure of being listened to with sufficient attention when next she condescended to convey her gleanings of information to her young mistress. It will be necessary, however, before reciting the words which Signora Olive found so interesting, to give some account of what had preceded them.

CHAPTER XIV.

Tell him, revenge is come to join with him,
And work confusion on his enemies.

SHAKSPEARE.

FATHER Laurence had retired from the chapel to his own study (as he called it) determined, in pursuance of the resolution he had taken, not to hold any farther communication with the Count, till he had conversed with the monk Dominic, on the subject of the miraculous visitation.

The delayed arrival of his counsellor greatly annoyed the holy father. It doomed him to the endurance of his own company, uncheered either by the conversation of the grave and punctilious priests, who had accompanied the Abbess, or by

the quiet consolation of a solitary cup of wine : for he deemed it absolutely necessary that Father Dominic should find him alone, and equally so, that no unclerical appurtenance should meet his eye. At length, his patience being completely exhausted, he rose to leave the room ; but at the moment he opened the door, in order to run away from himself, Father Dominic appeared.

“ I am thankful to see you, brother,” said the confessor of the castle, “ for I greatly feared some mischance had befallen you by the way.”

This friendly greeting was answered in a suitable manner, and the two monks seated themselves at the opposite sides of a small table, which stood in the middle of the room.

But before they enter upon the business which occasioned their meeting, it may not be amiss to give the reader a slight sketch of the new guest.

In appearance, he was lean, sallow, stiff, and repulsive ; in this, as in all things, a perfect contrast to the well-fed confessor of the castle.

The birth, parentage, and education of Father Laurence were known to every child in the neighbourhood ; but no man was ever heard to tell whence Father Dominic came, what was his lineage, or his early history. In his convent he had the reputation of great and unusual learning ; but how he acquired this, it would be difficult to say, as he had never given to the world any written proof of it, and it was now many years since he had been known to hold long converse with any one. He came to the convent of Santa Croce in the year 1540, in company with a monk of the name of Isidore ; a man somewhat younger than himself, and known to be of obscure origin, but who was welcomed by every member of the wealthy community of Santa Croce, in consequence of his having distinguished himself throughout the whole Christian world, by having put forth some treatises of uncommon power, against the detested doctrines of Luther.

The fame he had thus acquired, not only

obtained his own reception, but that of his friend Fra' Dominic, who desired admission at the same time.

A few years after Father Isidore had become a member of this establishment, the late Count d'Albano dismissed his domestic confessor, in order to receive Father Isidore in the same capacity.

It was a matter of much speculation, and some astonishment, when this celebrated monk, who, though still a young man, was thought to stand a good chance of being elected abbot at the next vacancy, requested permission to leave his convent, and become domestic confessor at the castle.

He retained this situation for several years ; when, by the interest of some powerful friend at Rome, he was appointed abbot of a community of his own order at Ancona.

He left the family of the late Count, to take possession of this preferment, at the same time that Lady Geraldine d'Albano quitted her fa-

ther's roof to commence her noviciate at Sant' Catherina's, of which convent he was, by his new office, to be visitor.

The convent of Sant' Catherina's was at only two miles' distance from Ancona, and as the Count's health was too infirm to permit his leaving home, the new abbot was her protector on the journey.

His friend, father Dominic, remained at Santa Croce, and was never known to form any intimacy afterwards, unless that might be called such, which induced him occasionally to hold friendly converse with the present confessor at the castle.

What the motive was, which led Dominic to this intercourse, it might be difficult to decide—that of Father Laurence was easy enough to divine. Father Dominic was one of the most severe disciplinarians of the community, and the appearance of a more than common familiarity of intercourse with such a man, had a very salutary influence on the reputation of our good-hearted friend. Of this he was perfectly

aware, for he had profited by it, on more occasions than one.

Father Laurence, though not considered by any of his acquaintance (except, perhaps, Olive) as one of the shining lights of the world, had yet a pretty acute faculty of discerning character.

He knew that incomprehensible theology, mystic visitations of the spirit, and the pouring out, not vials, but magnums of wrath against every person suspected, in the remotest degree, of leaning to the pestilential heresy of Luther, were the hobby-horses of his holy friend, Father Dominic, and he felt certain, that besides the convenience he anticipated to himself, he could in no way please his friend better, than by sending for him to the castle, at a time when such awful and mysterious circumstances had occurred.

Father Laurence was quite right in this supposition, even more so, indeed, than he was himself aware of.

The table at which the monks placed them-

selves, was used on ordinary occasions to accommodate sometimes a mixture of life-preserving cordials, and sometimes a flagon of simple Lachryma Christi; but at the present eventful moment, it sustained the weight of sundry huge folios of controversial divinity, besides a few of the most vehement tracts against reformers.

One of these, by its being placed open against several large tomes, arranged as a desk, appeared to have been the subject of Father Laurence's studies, at the moment his friend entered. The eyes of Dominic were naturally attracted to the open page—every sentence of which was graven on his head.

“I rejoice to see you thus employed, my brother,” he said; “this is both the last, and the noblest effort of the most powerful pen extant. Isidore has here surpassed himself.”

As he spoke, he laid his extended hand upon the open page, and fixed his eyes on the face of his companion.

Father Laurence, though he had never read a

single line of it, was, nevertheless, perfectly prepared to speak on the subject.

“ I really think so,” he replied, returning the inquiring look of Dominic, with the open, well-pleased air of a modest man, delighted to find the opinion he had ventured to form, confirmed by high authority.

“ I really think so. The Abbot of St. Andrea has long been considered by me as the first living apostle ; and yet this performance exceeds even what I expected from him.”

This was spoken with so much unction, that Father Laurence, as he listened to the well-modulated cadence of his own voice, triumphed inwardly at the perfection of his hypocrisy. He saw not the little quiet smile, that twisted, the least in the world, the thin dry lips of Dominic.

“ But we must not,” continued Father Laurence, “ at this moment, indulge in such discussions ; I have matter of much import to communicate.”

Dominic fixed his eyes silently upon him, and he continued.

“Of course you know that the far-famed Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s is here?”

The other bowed an affirmative.

Father Laurence hardly knew how to begin his marvellous history.

“You have never, brother, heard aught of this holy lady, that could in any way impugn her sanctity?—her orthodoxy?—in short, her devotion to the Catholic faith?”

The usual expression of Dominic’s countenance was that of a dry, cold severity; in conversing with Father Laurence, it sometimes relaxed into a sneer; but, on the present occasion, his manner was that of a person, absorbed in some business, foreign to the moment, and it was with effort that he had appeared to listen when his companion began to speak. But the moment he heard this question, his attitude, which was rather one of meditation than of listening, suddenly betokened the most eager attention and curiosity; his half-closed eyes opened widely, and fixed themselves on the countenance of Father Laurence, who, gratified

and encouraged by the interest which he saw he had excited, by what he feared might be treated as a very silly business, added, with increased dignity of manner and solemnity of tone—

“Have you ever, brother Dominic, heard any thing like this?”

“Do not pause in your tale, to question me, brother—proceed—and, as you value your salvation, hide nothing that has come to your knowledge.”

“It was for the especial purpose of telling you every thing, my reverend brother, that I sent for you—having done so, must be a sufficient guarantee that I can wish to conceal nothing.”

“You say well—you have done your duty. Shrink not from the fullest avowal of all you know, of all you suspect—and your faithful courage shall be heard of, where it shall win you honour in this life—and eternal glory in the life to come.”

As Dominic uttered these words, he rose from his chair, and grasped the arm of his com-

panion with such energy, that the startled Father Laurence began to fear he was unwittingly engaging in a matter of greater importance than he had any inclination to meddle with. But it was too late to recede.

Dominic drew forth his tablets. This of itself is an appalling ceremony to a good-hearted man, who is about to talk of heresy; and Father Laurence took a moment to consider, with how little it might be possible to satisfy the ravening zeal of his orthodox brother; but Dominic seemed to read his purpose; for, with an accent of severity that made him tremble, and at once turned all his good-heartedness inwards, he said—

“This business, holy brother, is, perhaps, of higher importance than you are aware. It is impossible—and perfectly needless, to inform you of all the circumstances which make it so. It will be sufficient for you to know, that the church has already fixed an eye of suspicion on this specious woman—and if there be a crime at this day, that the holy office would visit more

severely than all others—it is that of concealing, or softening, in the very least degree, any circumstances known concerning her.”

This was sufficient;—and without further scruple Father Laurence proceeded.

“ You have, probably, never heard, brother, that it was the intention of my pious, and truly catholic patron, to devote his only daughter, the Lady Juliet d’Albano, to the cloister?”

“ I think I have heard such an intention hinted at.”

“ He had determined, by my advice, not to announce this intention to the young lady till the arrival of her aunt, the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s, in whose convent she was to take the veil.”

“ And wherefore this concealment, brother?”

“ To prevent the opposition, and struggle, which so often take place, when a poor, weak, worldly, young girl is first informed, that she is intended for the cloister.”

Father Dominic knit his brows.

“ Such timid shrinking from the truth argues

but poor preparation, on the part of your young penitent, brother."

"I have done my duty by her, brother Dominic, but I will not deny that she is a stiff-necked girl—and no great wonder. Her maternal grandmother—but, doubtless, you know that dreadful story.—My noble patron has laboured too unremittingly to atone for the sin of his father, for any one to be ignorant of its having been committed."

A dark and frightful expression gleamed from the eyes of Dominic.

"Speak not of that—tell me of her daughter—of this Abbess."

"It is, indeed, of her that I would speak. When the Count announced to her his intention respecting the dedication of his daughter, instead of receiving it, as he naturally expected she would, with joy and gladness, my Lady Abbess lectured him upon the cruelty of his intention—she even wept, as she spoke of the manifold privations of the cloister!"

"But you heard her not?" suddenly inter-

rupted Dominic.—“There was no witness but her brother?”

“None, holy brother, as to this; but he will not be reluctant to state it.”

“What! against this glory of his house? This proud woman, whose name he has made to ring in our ears, as if she were the only Catholic Abbess in the land—he witness against her?—Never!”

“Be patient, brother Dominic, till you have heard what I have further to tell—perchance you may change your mind. The Count remonstrated like a pious nobleman, and one whose confessor ——”

“Enough of that, brother.—What said the Count?”

“He said, brother Dominic, that he understood not, how a Catholic Abbess could hold such doctrine—on which she burst upon him like one possessed, drove the good Count from her presence, as if he had been her slave; and then—refused to see me—refused to speak to me—refused to speak to me, brother Dominic.”

“And is this all?”

“It is but the preface, brother. My patron left her astonished—horror-struck—confounded. And during the agony of mind which followed, he thinks—that is, it has been borne in upon his mind, that a miraculous voice uttered in his ear,—‘*Accuse her of heresy.*’”

“Will he obey it?” inquired the Monk Dominic, with a degree of eagerness that hardly left him breath for the question. “Say, does he mean to do so?”

“In that,” replied Father Laurence, with an air of much dignity, “in that, he will be altogether guided by me.”

Some phrase of violence seemed bursting from the lips of Dominic, but he instantly checked it, and said, with even more than his usual quietness of manner, and laying his hand gently on the sleeve of Father Laurence—

“Brother—there is an awful responsibility attached to the advice you may give at this crisis—and any falling away in zeal might be visited upon you, in a manner, the bare idea of

which makes me tremble for you, my old and valued friend."

Father Laurence turned pale.

"What is the advice you have given?"

The confessor hastened to declare that it was the fervent zeal which he felt ever burning at his heart, that had induced him to seek the assistance of his enlightened friend—

"Is it not said," he continued, "that in the multitude of counsellors there is wisdom, brother?—Truly, it is an awful crisis? Kyrie eleïson!"

While Father Laurence crossed himself, and cast his eyes to heaven, Dominic rose from his chair, and paced the apartment. His companion rose too, and waited in some anxiety for what was to follow.

"Brother Laurence," said Dominic, stopping suddenly, and taking his arm, "you are a good and pious Catholic—and, as I have said, your name shall be heard where honour follows good report—but there is in this business something, which, as it seems to me, requires the interfer-

ence of those who can have no feelings, either of partiality, affection, or dislike, for any of the parties concerned. The responsibility will be heavy, fearfully heavy. You know not, you cannot guess, what this involves. I have reason for thinking, that I could interfere in it, with less danger than you could.—Shall I see the Count?”

“Assuredly, my brother—my first wish is, that ~~he~~ should have the benefit of your invaluable advice.”

“Is it too late to see him to-night?”

“I think he will expect it—but forget not that I have told you he has been visited by a miracle.—Let us seek him together.”

“Father Laurence,” said Dominic solemnly, “I must see the Count alone.”

“Surely, brother—except myself, none shall be present.”

“Father Laurence, I must see the Count entirely alone—not even you must be with him.”

“That is somewhat strange, brother—I have been his confessor these twenty years, and must I be excluded from a business such as this?”

“So it must be—or I leave the business wholly in your hands—decide for yourself. I know what I am about when I desire to see him alone—take care what you do, when you refuse it.”

Father Laurence did not love power for its own sake; he valued that, and every thing else, only in proportion as it increased his facility of obtaining his personal comforts and enjoyments. Assuming, however, a merit from his acquiescence, which in truth did not belong to it, he endeavoured to persuade his friend that to him, and him only, he could have been induced to yield a privilege so dear.—“But I can refuse to do nothing that you advise, brother Dominic. Shall I acquaint the Count of your wish to see him alone?”

“No;—lead me to him, and then leave us.”

“I will do so; but tell me one thing before we go.—Is it your intention to dissuade the Count from sending Lady Juliet to Sant’ Catherina’s?”

“I understand not your motive for the ques-

tion, brother;—assuredly I shall never give advice that might prevent any maiden from becoming a blessed spouse of Christ. There are other convents besides Sant' Catherina's."

It was exactly at the moment when Father Laurence asked this question concerning Lady Juliet, that Olive applied her ear to the key-hole. She distinctly heard both the question and answer, and perceiving that the steps of the holy men approached the door, she darted from it, and escaped unseen into a neighbouring apartment.

As soon as the two monks were fairly out of sight, Olive hastened to her mistress, and found her just returned from an interview with her aunt. Morgante had waited, according to the orders of Juliet, at the door of the Abbess's room, that he might bring her notice, as soon as she entered it, and by him she had sent a message, requesting the company of her niece. Juliet promptly obeyed, but was more curious to learn all that had passed, than bold to ask it; and her aunt, though she received her with so much quiet

cheerfulness, as to remove every fear that the impression made by her unknown friend was unfavourable, yet seemed not to have any intention of repeating the particulars of what had passed. In answer, however, rather to the anxious look of Juliet than to any questions she asked, the Abbess said, that, notwithstanding difficulty, danger, and distance must divide them for a time, she ardently desired their union, and confidently hoped to see it accomplished.

Had Juliet been reasonable, this must have contented her; and so it would, but for that troublesome inheritance, which she shared with all the female descendants of our common mother. When Eve bequeathed knowledge to man, she bequeathed curiosity to woman. Without this stimulant, our weaker minds would perhaps have found no interest in the mighty questions which occupy the intellects of our rulers, whether civil, military, political, or domestic, and the union between us would have been less perfect. So all is for the best. Nevertheless, Juliet now suffered severely from her

portion of the common blessing. It is probable that the Abbess divined all this, but some motive, stronger even than her wish to please Juliet, restrained her from being more explicit.

After pronouncing the consolatory assurance above-mentioned, she changed the subject, by relating that after she had parted from their young friend at the tree (for, fearing his being seen, she had declined his attendance on her return to the castle) he had run after her to give her an embroidered glove, which from the silks being of black and grey, he thought must belong to one of her ecclesiastical attendants—he had found it on entering the wood, close beside which they had sat; she added, that she had given it to Morgante, who might do the owner a grace by restoring it.

The Abbess then dismissed her with an injunction, not very necessary, to remember that, at break of day on the morrow, Morgante was to attend her to the chestnut tree.

When Olive entered, Lady Juliet was so earnestly occupied in endeavouring to guess

what could have passed between her aunt and her lover, that she started at the sound, as if some alarming apparition had appeared.

“What are you thinking of, Signora? You need not look so terrified at the sight of me—I am come on purpose to help you out of a scrape, that you have got into. I have heard—no matter as to who told me—that your aunt makes some difficulties as to taking you home as one of her nuns; it is either because she thinks you don’t like it—or because you are not holy enough. Now I have just found out—and how I did that, is no matter neither,—that if she won’t take you, some other convent must : so I recommend you to make up your mind at once. I suppose you had rather go with this fine aunt, that you are so mighty fond of, than be a nun any where else?”

“Are you quite sure of what you say, Olive?”

“I am, Signora : but let no one but your aunt know that I told you.”

“Then trim that lamp for me, Olive ; I must see her again before I sleep.”

The Abbess had given her evening bene-

diction to the nuns, and Juliet found her writing, with Morgante standing beside her, as if waiting for her letter.

“ May I interrupt you for a moment, my dearest aunt? I have just learnt something that I must tell you.”

“ Wait an instant, Juliet, and I shall have given Morgante his message. We shall then be alone.”

“ I fear not to speak before Morgante, and, perhaps,” glancing her eye at the letter, “ perhaps what I have to say may affect what you have to write.”

“ Speak, then, my love.”

Juliet repeated the alarming communication of Olive. The Abbess reflected for a moment, and then said—

“ Your waiting-woman has done us good service, Juliet. I thought that my power here was sufficient to prevent this. I must change my plan; you must, indeed, go with me to Ancona, my dear child,—I cannot leave you here. Will you consent, Juliet, to enter on

your noviciate, and trust to me for the result?"

"I will trust to you," replied Juliet, "on that and on every other subject, as blindly and as securely as an infant trusts to the mother who bears it in her arms."

CHAPTER XV.

Je suis bien sûre que tous ces rouages ne marchent ainsi de concert que pour une fin commune qu'il m'est impossible d'apercevoir.

J. J. ROUSSEAU.

ON the following morning, Juliet and her page repaired, at the appointed hour, to the appointed place. The lovers met—once more exchanged vows of enduring love, and parted. Had any thing occurred in this tender interview, which could assist the progress of our story, it should be narrated; but this was not the case. The young man was as silent on all that had passed the evening before, as the Abbess had been; but there was a fervour and confidence of hope in all he said respecting the future, which, for the

moment, effectually drove anxiety for the present from the memory of both. They spoke but of their future union, and "leaped the gulph between." Morgante, when his mistress turned to depart, presented the Abbess's packet to the young man.

Juliet, as she looked anxiously at its volume, thought that it must contain many letters. The youth showed no surprise at receiving it, but secured it carefully in his bosom. One last fond kiss was exchanged, and he was gone.

On returning to the castle Juliet immediately went to her aunt's room, and found her preparing for breakfast, which, in the hope of conciliating the Count, she determined to take in public. Accordingly, they entered the hall together. The tables were spread as usual, and the family assembled; as they came in at one door, Father Laurence, leading his pupil by the hand, and followed by the ecclesiastical officers of the Abbess, entered at another; but the Count did not appear. Lady Geraldine walked to the place assigned her, and took her seat;

the rest followed her example, with the exception of Father Laurence, who, before pronouncing the grace, said in a solemn and sorrowful voice, that his eccellenza the Count was prevented by indisposition from honouring the table by his presence. The grace was then said and sung, and the business of the hour proceeded.

As soon as the meal was over, the Abbess called to her the little Ferdinand, who obeyed her voice, gentle as it was, in trembling; she dismissed him on a message to his father, inquiring whether he were well enough to admit a visit from her; and bade him bring the answer to Juliet's parlour, whither she would go to wait for it. After considerable delay a servant entered, and told her that his eccellenza was ready to receive her.

She found him seated in his library, with no appearance of indisposition, but with an air of sullen stateliness. Father Laurence was placed near him. The monk rose as she entered the room, but the Count did not stir.

There were many reasons which, at that

moment, made Lady Geraldine desirous of conciliating her brother, or this haughty manner of receiving her might have tempted her to show that she could be haughtier still. As it was, she seated herself opposite to him, without appearing to notice his altered manner, and civilly expressed her hope, that he was not suffering from any severe indisposition.

“ I am ill at ease, Lady Geraldine. What is your pleasure with me ?”

“ What I have to say, brother, I should prefer speaking to yourself alone.”

“ I have need that my confessor should be near me. I fear not to trust him ; nor is there, I would hope, any danger in your doing so.”

“ Be it so, then, if such be your pleasure, Theodore.—I can render what I would say in few words, and they shall be such as the Abbess of Sant’ Catherina’s might speak to the Count d’Albano before all the world. Since we last parted, I have thought much of your proposal, Theodore ; and though I should have wished that the connections and influence of my fair

young nephew might have been strengthened and increased by our Juliet's making a splendid marriage, yet, if the present interests of our house, as well as her soul's welfare, render her taking the veil desirable, I withdraw my objections to it, and will immediately permit her commencing her noviciate in my community; wherein, if I have cause to be satisfied with her conduct, she shall afterwards have the honour of receiving the veil—and that without any dower or pension whatever.”

It seemed that, little as they had been together, Lady Geraldine d'Albano knew her brother well.

Never did words effect a more complete change of sentiment in a hearer, than did this speech of the Abbess. His suspicion of heresy and his miraculous visitation were alike forgotten, and effaced from his mind like an impression made on sand when the waves wash over it.

He exchanged a look with his confessor; it was not, however, a look of consultation, but of

triumph. He was again the proud brother of the far-famed Abbess of Sant' Catherina's—and what was better still, his daughter was in the highway to be a far-famed Abbess too. Mortification and rage had driven him almost to madness; and in his delirium, as he was himself ready enough to call it, he had uttered words, and conceived thoughts, for which he hoped soon to receive absolution. Being now quite ready again to laud, honour, and glorify the Abbess, to the highest pitch of earthly reverence, he thought all the mischief was over, and that every thing would proceed, as it ought to do, exactly according to his will and pleasure. With the limited view that his little mind permitted him to take of the future, he saw no greater difficulty likely to arise from his blunder, than what might be occasioned by the necessity of sending Father Laurence to Santa Croce, to inform the monk Dominic, that he had altogether mistaken the Lady Abbess, and that every thing was just as it ought to be in that quarter.

The arrangement in his mind of this comfortable, easy, and most satisfactory termination of all his anxieties, took some minutes, during which he remained silent; but his countenance expressed the most unequivocal satisfaction, which at length broke forth in words:—

“ I humbly thank the blessed saints, my dearest sister, that I now find myself capable of fully understanding, and doing justice to your wisdom, piety, and great generosity. Such a marriage as that you speak of, could it be obtained immediately, and without the necessity of any dower being paid, would, unquestionably, be highly advantageous; but to find such, might be difficult, not to say impossible. Wherefore I gladly and thankfully accept your offered kindness for my daughter; and, in giving her to your keeping, I am not without hopes that the odour of her sanctity may reach not only to Heaven—but to the Pope, and that she may produce to her family, as you, my honoured sister, have already done, honour and glory, both here and hereafter!—Amen!”

The Abbess rose; the business on which she had sought her brother was settled according to her wish; and, perhaps, she felt that it would be acting wisely to retire, before she had been tempted to give utterance to any of the bitter thoughts she felt rising within her.

“Forgive me, brother, if I leave you,” she said;—“To-day is the last of my stay—and I have business with my almoner.”

“Stay one moment, sister Geraldine.—Have you announced to Juliet that she is to have the honour and happiness of going with you?”

“Yes, my lord, I have——and I would recommend that nothing more be said to her on the subject at present. She is very young, and, as yet, not well prepared; but I feel no doubt that her conduct, in future, will be all I wish.”

Having said this, she quitted the room, leaving the Count and his confessor to congratulate each other on the happy termination of all their difficulties.

“I cannot spare you to-day, my good friend,” said the Count, in answer to a hint from Father

Laurence, that it would be well to lose no time in communicating to his brother Dominic the change that had taken place.

“ There is not time for you to go and return before noon—and we must not be without your grace at dinner to-day; neither can you set forth after dinner, with sufficient certainty of being able to leave your friend in time to perform the vesper service. Remember, holy Father, that you must introduce a prayer for all who shall be about to travel by water.—To-morrow, Father Laurence, you shall ride to the convent, and tell these happy tidings to the good Father Dominic.—He is an excellent man, that Father Dominic. If the business had been his own, he could not have taken it more to heart.—Yes, yes, holy Father, you must go to-morrow without fail; he will be well pleased to hear this news.—Truly he was most anxious to help me.”

CHAPTER XVI.

On earth thou wert all but divine,
As thy soul shall immortally be;
And our sorrow may cease to repine,
When we know that thy God is with thee.

BYRON.

AFTER dismissing her almoner, Lady Geraldine invited her niece to walk with her. They passed through the garden, and out at the little postern door that led to the woods.

As soon as they had passed it, the Abbess said—"Do you know a walk, Juliet, on this side the stream, and almost at the very edge of it, that leads to an isolated mass of rock?"

"Yes—I have been often there."

“Then the path is still kept clear from briars?”

“I think it is—but lately I have walked more frequently on the other side.”

“Let us try this to-day, Juliet. I have much to say to you. There is a seat within the shadow of that rock, where I have spent the happiest hours of my life, with my mother for my sole companion. It is there that I will open my heart to you.—To God only have I done this, since last I sat there—it has been a long cold interval, and, till I saw you, I believed that all the warmth of feeling within me was dead and gone for ever.”

They set out together. The path, like that on the other side of the stream, led through a thick grove, but it passed much nearer to the water, and at some points touched its margin. The walk soon became too narrow and overgrown, to permit their walking side by side, and Lady Geraldine led the way. She hurried forward as if anxious to reach the point she aimed at; but ere she had gone far, she was

stopped by meeting some familiar object, which, though unseen for twenty years, seemed to be as fresh in her memory as if left but yesterday. First it was a well-known tree, that in an instant brought back some long-lost train of thought and feeling; a little farther, a piece of rock, that checked the current of the rapid stream, making it chafe and murmur, appeared to have a voice that spoke of what was lost, but not forgotten. Just beyond it, a narrow glade of soft mossy turf, through which trickled a small tributary spring, divided the trees by a short space of sunny verdure. There she seemed spell-bound. After standing for many minutes, looking round her, she turned from the path, and walked up the little valley; but at a short distance stopped, and looking earnestly on the ground, stooped as if to seek for some herb or flower among the grass. Juliet, who followed her, stopped too, and asked what she sought for, but when Lady Geraldine attempted to answer, she perceived that she was weeping. It was not difficult to guess the thoughts

which made these tears flow, and with too true a sympathy to wish to check them, Juliet silently turned again to the path, and walked slowly forward alone.

When she reached the solitary rock, and seated herself upon the bench of stone that had been hewn out of a projection which jutted from its side, she became for the first time aware of the air of profound solitude that this dark nook conveyed. Till now, she had only tripped past it, or about it, with that thoughtless gaiety which is too elastic in its temper for any impression of deep feeling to remain upon it. Our sensibilities must be awakened before we become conscious of their existence, and till this awakening takes place, it is rarely that any but the bright and sunny objects of nature, and such as harmonize with the light buoyant spirits of childhood, have charms for our fancy. But now, this lonely tower of dark grey rock, turning its front from the sun, the stately ilex that stretched forth its eternal foliage to meet it, and the deep stillness that seemed

settled round the spot, all found something that answered to them in the heart of Juliet. It was here the friend so lately found, but so dearly loved, had enjoyed the society of her mother; it was here she was about to receive the confidence refused to all others, and she welcomed the dark solitude which promised that none should intrude to disturb it.

In a few minutes her aunt joined her.

“This was the last walk we took together, Juliet; she was then as well in health, as she had been for years—but within twenty-four hours, I held her dead body within my arms.”

All traces of tears had been wiped from the face of Geraldine, before she rejoined her niece; nor did even this horrible recollection renew them; she seemed braced for the scene she had to go through.

Juliet had risen from the bench to meet her. The Abbess took her hand, and looking earnestly in her face, said:—

“Is it not strange, that, after a dreary interval of twenty years, I should again find myself on

this spot, with another being wearing the same soft features, and uttering the same sweet tones as those I loved so dearly?"

"I am grateful to Heaven," said Juliet, "for giving me this dear resemblance; but how is it—may I, in this hour of promised confidence, say to you every thing that is at my heart?"

"Do you not know you may?—what is it you would ask me, Juliet?"

"How is it, that you, a holy Abbess, devoted to the catholic faith, speak thus of one whom my father deems——"

"Speak it not!" exclaimed Geraldine, while a deep flush overspread her face, "let me not hear his blasphemy from your lips!"

"Forgive me! oh, forgive me!" cried the terrified Juliet.

"There is much to be forgiven—but not to you, my poor girl. It is painful to me," continued the Abbess, "to say what must lower your father in your estimation; but it would be guilt to leave a stain on the sacred name of my

mother. They may call her heretic, Juliet,—they may blaspheme their Saviour, and say he has condemned a model of his own pure faith to eternal torments : but I tell you, that the God of heaven and of earth never formed a human being, with more of angelic, and less of mortal nature, than my dear mother : I tell you,—I, who knew her heavenly spirit, and watched her, till her last sigh restored it to her God,—I tell you, Juliet, that not all the purity, not all the sanctity, that ever sighed within a cloister, could equal hers.”

Juliet felt awe-struck, and attempted not to reply.

“ Mistake not the cause of my emotion, my dear child,” resumed the Abbess ; “ I love you the better for the frankness and confiding courage of your question, and, in return, I will prove how deeply I can trust you.”

A strange vague suspicion, that made every nerve thrill, was creeping upon Juliet. She fixed her speaking eyes upon her aunt, who instantly understood, and answered her.

“ Yes, Juliet——it is even so. I too am a protestant.”

“ Great God ! what will become of her !” exclaimed Juliet, all the dreadful consequences of such an avowal rushing at once upon her mind. “ Oh, hush ! hush !” and almost frantic with terror, she laid her hand over the mouth of her aunt.

Geraldine pressed the trembling hand with her lips, but the next moment withdrew herself a short space, and said :—

“ Speak, Juliet : do you hold me accursed ?”

Juliet dropped on her knees before her, and looking up in her face, with an expression of the most confiding affection, murmured in a low whisper—

“ Whatever you are—that would I be.”

A passionate burst of tears fell upon the pale cheeks of Geraldine.

“ My child !—my mother’s child !” she exclaimed, pressing her fondly to her bosom, “ I thank God that I have lived to know and love thee !”

Juliet fondly returned the embrace ; but she was in a state of dreadful agitation. Brought up with all the terror of catholic persecution ever before her eyes, the fearful image that pressed upon her mind was—her aunt in the power of the Inquisition.

“ Hush ! hush ! ” she repeated wildly, “ remember the nuns—Father Laurence—Olive.”

“ Fear not for my safety, my sweet girl ; for twenty years I have had to guard, from all eyes, every thought that deserved the name, every opinion upon which my soul rested for salvation ;—fear not for me now.”

“ Oh, you have suffered ! how dreadfully you have suffered !—teach me but how I can make you happy, and I will forsake every thing, forget every thing—to do it.”

“ I am happy at this moment, dearest, happier far, than I dared ever hope to be ; and I shall be happier still, when I know that your mind understands my mind, as well as your heart does my heart.”

“ Alas ! I am bewildered—show me the way

out of this labyrinth of mist and doubt—my dear, dear aunt! I cannot fear—I can only love you,—but tell me—tell me—yet I know not what to ask.”

“ Juliet, listen to me calmly, and I will leave you nothing to ask. You are very young for such a confidence, but your fate depends upon it. When you know the whole of my situation, you will be able to judge of your own—but you cannot do so, without being made acquainted with all the circumstances which made me what I am. Have you patience to listen to a long and dismal story?”

“ If to listen to every word you shall utter, as if my life hung upon each syllable, could be all you required of me, how well would you be satisfied!”

“ My mother was a noble English lady, the only daughter of the Earl of Arlborough, a faithful servant to King Henry the Eighth, and one of the zealous disciples of that pure religion, which was first established in England during his reign. It was in the course of the year which succeeded

the death of Anne Boleyn, when the King's zeal for the reformed faith was so far relaxed as to offer hopes to the Holy See of recovering its influence in England, that my father visited that country, on one of the many missions from Italy. He was not only a nobleman of high rank and consideration, but distinguished by the uncommon beauty of his person, and his skill in all knightly accomplishments. He wooed and won my mother. Though both were young, both were sincere, and zealous in their different faiths—and, I believe, both hoped to have the happiness of converting the object of their love, to that which each believed the truth. On reaching her new home, my mother found that every thing about it denoted rank and power. The establishment included then, as it does now, a resident priest, who officiated in the chapel, and filled the office of family confessor. A meek and amiable man occupied the situation when my mother arrived, and though she soon found that the hope of winning my father to her faith was a vain one, she flattered herself that, at least, she

should be suffered to adhere to her own, without molestation.

“At the neighbouring convent of Santa Croce, was a monk called Isidore; he had been recently received into the society, and his arrival was welcomed as an honour, from his having greatly distinguished himself by his polemical writings.

“Strong as is the enmity between the Hugonots and Romanists now, it was, perhaps, still more violent then. The scenes acting in France had worked men’s minds into frenzy, and the struggle of England with the Holy See, now so happily at rest for ever, fixed every eye. Among the champions who had stood forth in defence of the impugned doctrines of the Romish Church, this Isidore was foremost. Subtile, acute, uncompromising, and eloquent, his volumes seemed to burn their way into the hearts of men. His name was in every mouth, and even those who most detested his opinions, confessed the genius with which they were supported.

“Not a few among the reformers had directed

all the power of truth, and all the ingenuity of argument, against him; but each fresh attack seemed only a signal for his again putting forth his strength. The year before my mother's marriage, her brother, who was several years older than herself, and who, notwithstanding his nobility, possessed a degree of scholarship of which a monk might have been proud, induced by the glaring sophistry with which this Isidore had advocated some of the most objectionable tenets of his delusive faith, himself took up the pen against him; and whether it were the singularity of a warlike nobleman's entering the field of polemics, hitherto considered as belonging almost exclusively to the priesthood, or whether his treatise really had extraordinary merit, I know not; but it is certain, that the sensation produced by it was greatly beyond what any of the opponents of Isidore had hitherto occasioned. Its influence, however, on the mind of Isidore himself was far greater than on that of any other; but it was not the reasoning which touched him, it was the triumph. This he has

never forgiven—nor ever can forgive. My mother, my dear gentle mother, was his first victim; I have been his second; and could he reach you, Juliet, he would not rest till you had become his third—but there I think that I shall overmatch him.

“This monk, still smarting from defeat, took up his residence at the neighbouring convent, immediately after my father had brought home his bride.

“The family of Albano have been for ages the benefactors of Santa Croce. Their richest lands were our gift, and their cemetery our resting-place. The intercourse between the castle and the convent was of the most intimate and friendly character, and my father’s marriage was an event almost as interesting to the one establishment, as to the other. The religion of the lady was, probably, a source of regret to both; but father Isidore, it was said, pledged himself to his new superior, that this marriage should not occasion the loss either of the zeal or the liberality of the Count d’Albano.

“ It was to avert this threatened mischief, that the superior of Santa Croce urged my father so strenuously to receive Father Isidore into his family, as to leave him no power to refuse. His former confessor was dismissed, and Isidore installed in his place.

“ The first symptoms of his influence were perceptible in the increased severity of religious observance throughout the household. The manners of Father Isidore were highly polished, and his conversation was that of a man who, while still in the flower of his age (for Isidore was then not thirty years old), had acquired the various information and deep knowledge of advanced life.

“ Nature never moulded a nobler exterior than that of Isidore Bartone. I remember him, while still in the full pride (in his case, I might call it, the full pomp) of manhood: his form was tall, majestic, and graceful; his features, of that firm and regular cast of beauty, which best endures the touch of time, and is also best calculated to conceal the workings of the spirit

within. In countenances where the traits are more mobile and easily distorted, passions leave their traces plainly marked, and an observing eye may read what feelings have oftenest passed over them, and cut the deepest. It was not thus with the visage of Bartone—those only who have watched, through years of suffering, for the deep mischief that was brooding beneath that proud and tranquil exterior, could learn to read, in its cold stillness, the doom that threatened them. To this man my father became deeply devoted. It is certain that by degrees, too gentle to excite offence, he taught his noble penitent to feel that his marriage was an act which demanded atonement; but it was several years before my mother became fully aware of this man's unlimited influence over her husband. To her his demeanor was profoundly respectful, but restrained; as if he feared to obtrude his own opinions, or wished to avoid listening to hers. Contrary as it is to the usual practice of catholics, it is certain that Isidore never made any attempt to convert my mother; and I have

thought this the strongest proof he ever gave of his true belief in the doctrines he taught. In my heart I believe, he hated her brother's blood too rancorously to become an agent in her salvation."

Juliet trembled as she listened to these fearful words, and involuntarily exclaimed—

"Dreadful !"

"Yes, Juliet, it is dreadful—and there is more behind—yes, it is dreadful—too dreadful for young ears—yet you must listen to it;—there is no other way to make you know your own position. I have deceived all others—but I will not deceive you—I hate my life of fraud—I hate the wicked craft that has taught me to unravel the tangled cheating of others—but know all, ere you judge me."

"My dearest aunt!—my own dear friend ! do not so mistake me——"

"Perhaps, my sweet girl, I understand what passes in your mind better than you do yourself. You cannot listen to such a tale as mine without feeling that, whatever I might have been under

happier circumstances, I *have* been—after all my triumphant success, my high renown—nothing but a poor pliant reed, that has learnt to bend without breaking.”

This was spoken in a voice of the deepest melancholy, but the caresses of Juliet suggested another train of thought—

“If indeed there be something left here,” she resumed, laying her hand on her heart, “not spoiled by the wear of a most unhappy life, it is you, my child, who will again warm it into existence—but I must not waste these precious moments.—There was no place of public protestant worship in Italy. To this privation my mother submitted, not without grief, but without repining, for it was inevitable. She had her English Bible, and this precious possession sufficed to sustain her faith in all its purity,—it sufficed too, in spite of constantly increasing sorrow, to support her gentle spirit in the strange and unfriendly land where her lot had fallen. My brother and myself were both pleasure and comfort to her, during the first few years of our

existence, but at the age of seven Theodore was withdrawn from her care, and Isidore became his preceptor. The first tears I remember to have seen her shed, were caused by her young boy's refusing a kiss from her. Father Isidore was standing near him, and, as I well remember, led him from the room, the moment he had seen him give this slavish mark of obedience. I was but two years his senior, but I can even now recall the burst of feeling with which I rushed into my mother's arms as soon as they were gone. I was already her companion, her confidant, her friend—and—dearer than all the rest,—her disciple. When I was fourteen, an attempt was made to send me from her to some distant convent for the completion of my education. It was Father Isidore who announced this to us. I think I see him now, gently opening the door, and entering with that deep calm upon his features, which defies the most searching glance to read his heart. I was sitting close beside my mother, listening to her recitation of one of those beautiful psalms, which seem almost super-

naturally to apply to the wants and sorrows of each of us. The monk began, by—but why should I dwell on scenes so hateful—in a word, he informed us, that such was my father's intention. My mother spoke not a single word. The monk retired, and the scene that followed between us you can perhaps imagine, Juliet: She still thought her influence with my father was sufficient to avert this blow—she tried it—for the last time—and in vain. It was then she discovered the miserable state of mind to which the superstitious terrors awakened by Isidore had brought him; his spirit seemed dead within him—or only alive to the most dreadful ideas of divine wrath and eternal punishment. To avert this, was now the only object of his waning existence—and I was to be the means of propitiation. The day of my departure was fixed, and the news of it was very nearly fatal to me; continued swoonings were succeeded by fever and delirium, and for many days my life was despaired of. My unhappy father suffered so dreadfully during this interval, that the power

of Isidore over him was, for the time, suspended; and he made a vow at the foot of the altar, that if my life were spared, I should never be parted from my mother, without my own consent.

“I recovered, and for one year nothing worse occurred to us, than watching the gradual incrustation of hard, unshrinking superstition around the heart of my most wretched father. His feelings towards his wife were fearfully changed—he regarded her now with terror rather than with love.

“During the whole of this time, I was in all outward forms a catholic. The feeling that my mother’s safety depended on my discretion, gave me early prudence. Could Isidore have accused her of making me a heretic, she would have been wholly in his power. But attentive, docile, and scrupulously observant in every point of ceremony and discipline, I guarded her precious safety with unceasing care. Yet, I am persuaded that Isidore was not deceived, but he never dared to hint a suspicion, which every one about us could have brought the strongest evidence to

disprove. Soon after I had completed my fifteenth year, Isidore addressed himself to me, respecting the dreadful state of my father's mind. He spoke to me, as to a good catholic, and deplored the load of guilt that weighed upon the soul of the Count, in consequence of his heretical marriage. By degrees he insinuated, that I had the power to 'save that soul alive,'—such were his awful words. When I inquired by what means,—his answer was, 'by becoming the bride of Christ—so shall your holy union atone for his most unholy one.' I reminded him of my father's solemn vow—he answered—'he will never break it; he vowed that you should never be separated from your mother, *but by your own consent.*' Then my mother will never be forsaken, was my reply—and I left him, thinking the terror was come and gone. I have heard of a horrible invention, Juliet, by which a wretch could be destroyed, by placing him in a chamber that should gradually contract around him, till he was crushed to death. This offers the best illustration I can think of, to convey an idea of the

destiny that fell upon me. Every hour brought me nearer—not to yielding—but to misery intolerable, from resistance.

“ The agonizing remorse of my father; his increasing terrors, under the assurance of eternal tortures; his two-fold despair for the deed he had done, and the vow he had made—were before me, around me, over me; brought nearer and nearer upon me, till life became a burden. My mother—my pious protestant mother, knelt to me, imploring me to be a nun—imploring me to leave her for ever. This was the only thing I could not do. I bore without a murmur the frightful penances that were inflicted on me: I supported all, with the resolution of a martyr; but I would not leave my mother.

“ For three lingering years I sustained this dreadful contest. As I advanced in age, I acquired a power, that only added to my misery. I learnt to read athwart the thick and rigid mask of his calm countenance, the frightful workings of the spirit that lay crouching within the heart of Isidore. I saw his growing hatred;

I saw, as plainly as if a palpable fire burned before me, the relentless determination to conquer, which glowed within him; but it only made me breathe more deeply the fatal vow—I will never leave her.”

The eyes of Juliet were earnestly fixed upon her aunt, whose countenance had hitherto lent a most eloquent commentary to her tale; but she now became so suddenly pale, that her young niece threw her arms around her, fearing she would faint.

“No, no,” said Geraldine, drawing a long sigh, and rousing herself from the weakness, “do not fear that I should faint—it is not like me,—but listen to me, Juliet: I must now utter what has lain within my heart for twenty years, and never yet been spoken. The mind of Isidore at length admitted the conviction that I should never yield. He ceased his persecutions, and left me totally in peace. I felt that some dreadful danger threatened us from this change. The half-closed eye, the soft,

and stealing step, the lowered voice, the humble quietness, all made me tremble.

“ I told you, Juliet, that we walked together, my dearest mother and myself, to this spot. She chid me for my terrors, and bade me thank Heaven for the interval of peace allowed us. I listened, till I almost learned to hope—and here, exactly here, she pressed her lips upon my cheeks and forehead, and told me to comfort my young heart, by remembering all I had been to her.”

Tears irrepressible again streamed from the eyes of the Abbess—she sobbed aloud.

“ You will not see me thus again, my child. All this is here so fresh before me, that I forget I am no longer the fond and tender girl, to whom tears are no disgrace. We returned to the castle. She was in perfect health, Juliet.—It was the custom, when we entered from our evening walk, that we should find a glass of lemonade for her, and a bowl of milk for me, placed ready for us, on the little table in her

parlour. It was so then. She drank, Juliet, and in less than an hour—oh! much less—she was seized with dreadful pains in the chest—nothing could assuage their violence—yet in that fearful agony she remembered the husband of her youth, and prayed to see him. The monk entered in his stead, and said *he could not come.* I lay on the bed beside her, and felt the convulsive throb of sorrow, which this answer produced. It was the last—a moment after she lay dead in my arms.”

Geraldine ceased to speak, and Juliet felt that she trembled; at length, in a deep whisper that startled her companion more than the loudest tone could have done, she said:—

“She was murdered, Juliet; she was poisoned; and Isidore was her murderer! I had no proofs; nothing but my own conviction—and who would listen to it? who was there that knew him, save myself? they said she died in apoplexy: and all the world, the little world of the castle, the village, and the convent, were quite satisfied that

so it was ; but I, poor helpless creature ! I knew that she was murdered.”

“ My poor, poor aunt !” sobbed Juliet.

“ Let us set a seal upon that horror, Juliet. I can bear all else without shrinking. We must speak of it no more. That tale is ended.”

After the interval of a minute or two, the Abbess resumed with a firm and composed tone of voice :

“ I need not repeat the process that was renewed to induce me to sooth my wretched father’s terrors by taking the veil. I had no longer any wish to continue in my home—no longer any repugnance to being shut up for ever from the world ; and I was willing to sacrifice much for the peace of my most unhappy father ; yet these were not, in truth, the only motives that led me to take the vows. I hardly know how to make you comprehend the singular state of mind which arose within me, and which grew upon me during the last three months of my residence at Albano. Having no longer any

thing to love, my faculties seemed to concentrate themselves on a dry, philosophical study of Bartone's character. Day by day I felt I understood him better, and I learned to scorn, as much as I detested him. It was a frightful study—every feeling of youth—guileless, lovely, unsuspecting youth, was withered in my bosom; I found that I could play upon this *master mind*, as the world called it, and a strange ambition seized upon me. While he was putting a hundred little plots in action to strengthen my father's will, and to bend me to it, I suddenly proclaimed to them both, that I was willing to obey their wishes. My poor father believed that God had softened my heart, in consequence of his unceasing prayers; and it has always been a consolation to me to know, that whatever was my strange and half insane motive for entering the cloister, it soothed his last hours.

“ For Isidore, his perplexity was extreme; and to watch it, repaid whatever sacrifice of lingering human feeling this step cost me. His next object was to place me where I could be

watched. For some time past he had been expecting the appointment of Abbot to the monastery of St. Andrea at Ancona. The old man who held the station was already dead, when I declared my resolution, and the news of his appointment reached his successor a few days after.

“The convent to which I was to go was instantly decided upon. It was that of Sant’ Catherina’s, at two miles’ distance from his own, and of which, by his new station, he was to be the visitor. To this arrangement I had no objection; I feared him not, and felt pleasure in the confidence of my power to defy his scrutiny. It was settled that I should travel under his escort; I took leave of my weak misguided father, and never saw him more.

“My subsequent fortune has arisen from many various causes, but all seeming to concur together to make me what I am. That hard unnatural state of mind, which came upon me after my mother’s death, gradually wore away, and my situation, though it rendered dissimula-

tion necessary for the preservation of my life, was less painful than the life I had lately led.

“ Though I could have no confidential friend (for I always felt that my confidence might be fatal to the object of it) there were many who loved me. The superior was a woman respected by no one. She was of high birth and powerful connections, and this, added to the extent and unusual accommodation of the establishment, its beautiful situation on the shores of the Adriatic, and its noble revenues, brought many ladies of high rank to her community.

“ The weak and capricious character of the Abbess, the irregularity of her discipline, and her abuse of the great power which the extent of our revenues placed in her hands, were, however, loudly talked of. She died when I had been eight years an inhabitant of the convent, and I was elected to replace her without opposition.

“ I believe Isidore rejoiced in the appointment. I think that he considered it as impossible that I should exercise power so absolute and

extended, without betraying the nature of the principles, which, I am certain, he has never ceased to suspect were in my heart. But he was mistaken, Juliet."

There was triumph in the smile with which this was spoken, and in the tone with which she proceeded.

"He has suffered tortures, or I greatly mistake him, as my growing reputation has risen before his eyes.—I am his master.—I have out-run him in his own narrow path.—It is in vain that he passes sleepless nights and restless days in devising snares to entrap me. Where his name is mentioned once at Rome, as a champion of their tottering faith, mine is heard a hundred times as the glory of it—and he hates me—oh! how he hates me!"

The Abbess rose from the stone bench on which they were seated, and walked round a sort of buttress which concealed the stream, and also sheltered the retreat from the eyes of all who might chance to pass on the other side of it. She now stood upon its margin, and with her

arm resting upon that of Juliet, who had followed her, she remained still and silent, as if to recover from the painful exertion which she had made.

There was a truth of feeling in the untutored mind of Juliet, which enabled her to understand better than long experience could have done without it, how idle any words of comfort must be, for sorrows such as she had listened to. She pressed the dear arm that rested on hers, but spoke not a word.

Geraldine turned homewards, but for a considerable part of the way she continued silent, and when at length she spoke, it was in a voice that showed she was greatly exhausted.

“ I have much more to say to you, Juliet—much that concerns yourself—but it must be in my quiet home. The remainder of this day must be devoted to ceremony. I wish it were already over, my dear child, and that I had quitted a place so pregnant with dear and bitter recollections, carrying with me all that is left to recall the good, and make me forget the evil of my days.”

CHAPTER XVII.

Defer no time, delays have dangerous ends.

SHAKSPEARE.

ON entering the castle, Juliet inquired for her page; and was told that, the poor boy being grievously sick, Father Laurence had laid him down on the bed in the hope of relieving the pain in his head, which was what he chiefly complained of.

As soon as the tedious business of dinner was ended, Juliet went with Olive to visit him, and found that the poor child had cried himself to sleep.

“Good Father Laurence is completely taken in by that boy,” said Olive, as she pointed to the pillow still wet with his tears.

“Look there, Signora—and you will see all that is the matter with him. He has been crying his eyes out, like a spoiled imp as he is, because he has found that you are going, without taking him, forsooth, to play his ape’s tricks among the holy sisters of Sant’ Catherina’s.”

“Poor fellow! Do not wake him, Olive. I fear, indeed, it will be impossible for me to take him there; yet I do believe that the little creature will almost break his heart, if he be left. I have been cruel to forget him as I have done.”

Though hopeless that any arrangement could be made by which this parting might be avoided, Juliet went to her aunt, and mentioned the hopeless sorrow of her little page.

“We will take him with us,” said the Abbess immediately.

This unexpected answer was almost as welcome to Juliet, as she knew it would be to the boy, and she earnestly expressed her joy and gratitude.

“You must not hope to have him always near

you, Juliet," said her aunt, laughing; "a page is not a regular part of a novice's equipment—but I think I can find the means of establishing him at no great distance—and I doubt not but he will prefer that to being left here."

Juliet undertook to answer for him, that he would be ready and willing to perform any service within the compass of his small power.

"Provided that from time to time he be permitted to get a glance at his liege lady?"

"Just so," replied Juliet, "if that can be managed, Morgante will be satisfied any where."

"Well, we must see about it. Your father will not object to his leaving the castle, I suppose?"

"Oh, no; he was never partial to the poor boy, and I think he will be pleased to get rid of him. And Olive?—what is to become of her?"

"Whatever may best please herself,—provided it does not bring her to Sant' Catharina's."

"I have no wish that she should accompany

us, believe me; her manners have been long very displeasing to me, and it will be quite a relief to lose sight and hearing of her grave and gay impertinences."

The day passed away; Juliet's preparations were completed; the little Morgante made supremely happy by learning that he was to be included in the Abbess's suite; and Olive perfectly satisfied by the permission of remaining first lady of the wardrobe at the castle. The little Ferdinand alone looked sorrowful at the mention of the approaching separation; but the promise of a voyage on the Adriatic, to visit his sister on the day she should take the veil, succeeded in consoling him.

Never did the gorgeous colouring of that beautiful sea look brighter than on the morning of Juliet's departure. The leaving, probably for ever, the paternal roof, especially when no other espousals are before us, than such as were offered to poor Juliet, must, in general, be a mournful business; but, on this occasion, it was not so. It is true, that the tender-hearted nuns shed

tears as they took leave of their friend Olive, and the priests exchanged benedictions with great solemnity; but, on the whole, the adieus were rather joyous than sorrowful. The principal personages were especially well pleased that a meeting so long delayed, and which, during a few hours, had threatened an end so hostile, was finally brought to this happy conclusion.

The holy train were again escorted, with every mark of reverence, to the water's edge; the Count waved a dignified farewell from his charger; the little Ferdinand imitated the action; the sails swelled, the prow was turned to the south, and again the Abbess of Sant' Catherina's, and her attendants, were bounding over the blue waves.

As soon as the pageant was fairly over, some strong recollections of the conversation he had held with the Monk Dominic, seemed to recur to the Count. He turned to Father Laurence, who had accompanied the procession on his mule, and said with some earnestness—

“ Now, good Father,—delay no longer. Ride over at once to your convent, and tell your friend how matters stand with us. Tell him, from me, that he will do well to forget all that he heard when last at the castle.—You understand me?”

“ Perfectly, my son,” replied Father Laurence, arranging the housings of his beast, “ and I hope I may succeed in making the matter as intelligible to my brother Dominic, as it is to me.”

“ Surely, good Father, you cannot suppose, that if I condescend to avow that, for a short space, and during the influence of too great warmth of temper (for the which I have already done penance), I fell into error, surely you cannot imagine that a brother of the Santa Croce would remember what I should wish him to forget?”

“ I would hope not, my son. Nevertheless, you should ever keep in mind, that great as is the attachment and gratitude of all that community for every member of your house—they can none of them be expected to feel

the same faithful devotion as your humble confessor."

"Then do whatever you find necessary, my good Father—I have no reserves with you—I am not myself better acquainted with the actual state of my finances, than you are—but if a few masses to atone for my mistake—or a donation of candles for the shrine of St. Dominic, would make the matter easier—I shall be willing to abide by any engagement you may see it advisable to make."

This was exactly such a mission as Father Laurence liked to undertake; and assuring his patron both of the zeal with which it should be executed, and his entire confidence in its success, he departed.

Before noon he returned, and brought the unexpected intelligence that Father Dominic had left the convent.

CHAPTER XVIII.

De l'ambition naissent les jalousies dévorantes; et cette passion, si basse et si lâche, est pourtant le vice et le malheur des grands.

MASSILLON.

THOUGH the departure of Juliet was entirely in accordance with her own wish, there was still some mixture of melancholy in it. She was quitting the scene of all her little interests, and a tear was in her eye as she waved her last farewell to the crowd. But as she turned from it, she saw her aunt standing close beside her; that name, lately so dreaded, now seemed to contain in itself a charm against every ill, present and future. Hanging on her arm, sometimes looking in her face, and sometimes following the

direction of her eye, as it watched the receding outline of the shore, Juliet soon forgot every sensation but that of pleasure.

A favouring gale carried them rapidly and steadily along, between the deep unclouded blue of the heavens and the bright wavy mirror that reflected its beauty. The soft sea-breeze blew gaily in Juliet's face as she stood at the stern of the vessel, and she felt conscious of inhaling health and cheerfulness with every breath. Morgante, who had never been on the sea before, was in extacies, and not even his respect for the Abbess could prevent his testifying his delight by a thousand childish gambols and expressions.

The nuns, half-pleased, half-frightened, stood respectfully apart; and, in low whispers, exchanged among themselves innumerable expressions of wonder, mingled with invocations to half the saints in the calendar, every time the wind whistled in the shrouds. The monks hung listlessly over the vessel's side; and the captain declared (but without an oath), that it

was a blessing to convey such a holy freight, for the very winds blew kind and christianly.

In a word, the little voyage was perfectly favourable, and the vessel reached Ancona, almost as punctually at the hour she was looked for, as if she had been borne thither by steam.

About a mile before they reached Ancona, the towers of Sant' Catherina's became visible.

"Look there, Juliet," said the Abbess, leading her to the side of the vessel—"there is the roof that has so long been mine, and which is now, I hope, to shelter you, in peace."

Juliet looked at the dark high walls; but though their extent was magnificent, and the situation of the building, which was so close upon the sea as to form at that point its boundary, most pre-eminently beautiful, she involuntarily sighed as she looked at the stately edifice.

The Abbess smiled, and easily reading her thoughts, replied to them by adding—

"Not for ever, Juliet—not for twenty years, not for one, I hope."

Juliet returned the smile, and now acknowledged that nothing could be more noble than the outline and position of the building.

“Observe that long stone balustrade, Juliet, that stretches along above the water, nearly the whole length of the building—that encloses a terrace, which, when sheltered by the walls of the convent from the rays of the western sun, is, perhaps, as beautiful a walk as the world can furnish.”

“Are the nuns and novices permitted to use it?” inquired Juliet.

“Only by special permission, and then they must be attended either by the mother of the novices, or some other elderly sister, appointed by me.—But I have found that walk a greater comfort than you can well imagine.”

“And those low arches,” inquired Juliet, “that run the whole length beneath it—what is their purpose? How the sea dashes against their buttresses.—Are there any chambers behind them? That incessant sound would be fearfully dismal.”

The Abbess did not reply; her attention seemed occupied by reconnoitering the building, at a very short distance from which, the vessel was now passing.

“What a pity it is, dear aunt,” said Juliet, “that we cannot land here at once; instead of going on to Ancona—I do so hate the idea of this visit to St. Andrea’s. If we landed here, we should escape it.”

“We should, Juliet—and, though seldom resorted to, I believe such a landing would be possible. But did I yield to the temptation,” she continued, in a whisper, “I should, for the first time, infringe a system which has enabled me to baffle all the toils its Abbot would have thrown around me. You know what the sight of his countenance, what the sound of his voice, must be to me—yet I have never once avoided him.”

“But tell me—is it indeed necessary that I should attend you thither?” asked Juliet anxiously. “Might I not remain at an inn?”

—or on board the vessel? Let sister Martha remain with me till——”

“Juliet,” interrupted her aunt, “he would not continue for an hour, unacquainted with the fact that I have brought you with me; and your not waiting upon him, would immediately be imputed to motives that might be very injurious to me.”

“Enough! enough! dearest,”——eagerly exclaimed Juliet—“I would face him—were he something still worse than he is—forgive my cowardly shrinking.”

“I may well forgive it, Juliet, when hardly a week of my life passes, without my being assailed by the same feeling. You will conquer it as I have done, and from a nobler motive; for mine has been but self-preservation.”

A few moments more brought them before the beautiful old city of Ancona; and, for the time, all other feelings in the mind of Juliet were lost in those of admiration and wonder.

This was the first time she had ever visited a

city. Even Venice, though the neighbouring wonder of the place where she was born, was still unknown; and the busy scene burst upon her, with a degree of animation and bustle that was equally unexpected and astounding. The party she was with, however, was not particularly well calculated to show her the wonders of a city. With their hoods closely drawn over their faces, and their thick veils completely enveloping their persons, the nuns, preceded by their Abbess, hurried at once into the shelter of an inn, which stood close by the landing-place. Juliet, after standing for one short moment at the door, to look upon a scene so animated, and so new, entered after them; and Morgante, trembling half with fear and half with delight, kept fast hold of her mantle, and, contrary to all etiquette, followed the party into a large room that appeared to have been prepared for them.

A night passed on board rendered some repair of their simple, but nice toilet, necessary for the holy ladies, before they presented themselves to the Abbot of St. Andrea; and Juliet was given

to understand, not only by the words of her aunt, but by the gestures, exclamations, and grimaces of the four nuns, that the absence of her little attendant was vehemently desired. He was accordingly dismissed; but before he left the room obtained permission to attend his mistress, in his quality of page, to the monastery.

The distance from the inn to St. Andrea's was rather less than a mile; but the Abbess, her attendant nuns, and Juliet, mounted their mules, while the monks and a few of the domestics preceded them on foot. Among these was Morgante, and when Juliet arrived at the gate of the monastery, she found him standing, with an air of prodigiously increased consequence, ready to hold the bridle of her mule, while a groom assisted her to dismount.

Nothing could be more gloomy than the appearance and situation of the building; and Juliet thought, as she entered the low massive archway, that the dark soul of its Abbot was well suited with a home. The outer gate, and the

interior door were both open, and the priests who had attended the Abbess to Albano, and who all belonged to the monastery of St. Andrea, ushered them in; but no other person was to be seen. This noiseless solitude, after the busy and animated streets of Ancona, had something awful in it; yet, long as was the cold, dark, vaulted passage, through which they were led, Juliet wished it had been longer still, when they reached the door at which it terminated, for within it was Isidore Bartone. The respite of a moment followed;—it was but an ante-room. Here the confessor of the Abbess, requested her to sit down, while he announced her arrival to his superior.

Juliet looked at her aunt, but met no glance in return; the eyes of Geraldine were fixed upon the ground. In a moment the confessor returned, and the Abbess immediately rose and passed on. At the door of the inner chamber stood the Abbot, waiting to receive her: his salutation was profoundly respectful, and was returned with equal ceremony. The four re-

cluses were each honoured with a separate "Ave," but he started when he saw Juliet, who only became visible, as the nuns, behind whom she had entered moved on to seats at the other end of the apartment.

"Who is this young lady, holy mother?" said he, abruptly addressing the Abbess.

"The Lady Juliet d'Albano, my lord," she replied, "the daughter of my brother; she brings you, my lord, a written greeting from her father, who had the honour of being for a time your pupil."

Juliet presented the letter, and bent her knee as she did so. The Abbot took her hand, and placed her on a chair beside her aunt; his touch made her tremble, and the more so, perhaps, from the death-like coldness of his hand. It was evident that he was struggling with some strong emotion, of which she was the cause; for, though he spoke not, he still stood before the chair in which he had placed her, with his eyes fixed upon her; his lips trembled, and his cheek was as pale as ashes. At length he again addressed

the Abbess, with more abruptness than seemed consistent with the general dignity of his manner, and ad—

“ You intend her for the cloister, holy mother ? ”

“ It is her father’s will, my lord.”

“ And, doubtless, it is yours too ? ”

“ Assuredly ; I receive near me, with pleasure, so dear a relative.”

“ When will she begin her noviciate ? ”

“ As soon as it may suit your lordship to appoint a day for the ceremony.”

“ To so blessed a work there should be no delay. We will name next Monday, holy mother—I will myself give her the habit.”

Had Juliet been as much a stranger to the character of the Abbot, as she was to his person, this zealous haste might have appeared to be the effect of devotion, or of courtesy, or perhaps of both ; but, as it was, she felt that he only welcomed another victim ; and not all her trust in the will and power of her aunt to save her, could prevent a feeling of terror creeping over her,

as she listened to him. Nothing could have been better calculated to restore her courage than the tone of voice in which the Abbess replied—

“Your lordship will thereby confer an honour, of which her father will be deeply sensible. Think you, sister Martha, that her habit may be ready by Monday?”

“There will be many ready to aid so good a work, dear mother,” replied the nun.

“Then Monday it shall be,” said the Abbess; and in a tone of such assured cheerfulness, that Juliet felt it would be treason to her aunt, to fear any event which she could arrange in such an accent.

“How long has the young lady’s vocation been decided upon?” inquired Isidore, in a voice so gentle, as instantly to recall to Juliet the description she had so lately listened to, from her aunt.

“My brother, I believe, has long intended it, but he waited my arrival to announce it to my niece.”

“It must have been joyful news to you, holy mother.”

“I am not sure, my lord, that it was so, on first hearing it. Lady Juliet is so young, that I doubted if she could herself be sure that her inclinations accorded with her father’s wishes.”

“Has she expressed repugnance?”

“I have found her, my lord Abbot, so docile in mind, and so pure in heart, that my objections to receiving her are completely removed.”

“Could you doubt this, holy mother, in a daughter of your house?”

The sneer with which this was uttered, was so ill concealed, that Geraldine, with all her command of countenance, coloured slightly, but she recovered herself in a moment, and answered with quiet dignity: “You say truly, my lord—a docile mind, and a pure heart, are what I might well expect to find in Juliet d’Albano—but my experience has taught me to believe, that some touch of sorrow is necessary before, in early youth, the mind can be brought to look upon

seclusion from the world, as the surest road to peace."

"Then I am to understand, that the young lady has either been unhappy in her home, or that she takes the veil reluctantly?"

"Neither, my lord,"—said Juliet most unexpectedly, "but I could not know my aunt, without wishing, young as I am, both to be with her, and to be like her."

"You answer freely and well, young lady," replied Isidore, "and when I say in return, that I hope your fortune may resemble hers, I anticipate for you a glorious reward for the youthful courage of your conduct, and your language."

He then rose, and opening the door of another room, which made part of the suite appropriated to his especial use, he said:—

"A small collation awaits you, ladies—will you partake it now? The air of the sea is wont to improve the appetite—I hope it is so in your case."

This speech was obeyed, with so much alacrity,

that it appeared the hospitable wish of the Abbot was likely to be gratified.

The party placed themselves at table, at the corners of which were placed dumb waiters, containing every thing supposed necessary for the repast, as none of the attendants of the establishment could appear without an infringement of their rules.

When seated at the table, Juliet was so placed as to afford her an opportunity of examining the still handsome countenance of the Abbot. He was now near seventy years of age, but his person had lost nothing of its majesty, his features none of their expression. His hair, which had been jet black, was now as remarkable for its silver whiteness; and the noble forehead, now left entirely bare, seemed to have gained in dignity, what it had lost in comeliness.

Though young in the study of physiognomy, Juliet saw, or fancied she saw, lurking in the deep-set eye, and in the corners of the still firm and well-formed mouth, decided indications of the hard and subtile nature she had heard de-

scribed; and so intently was she occupied in tracing these, that she continued her gaze unconsciously when the Abbot turned his searching glance upon herself; nor was it till his proud eye fell before the stedfast examination of hers, that she became aware of his having remarked her.

If she had disconcerted him, it was but for a moment; for he proceeded to fulfil the duties of a courteous host with grave but graceful politeness. No conversation, however, took place at table, excepting between the two superiors; and this chiefly on topics of business connected with the church.

“Have you heard further, my lord, of the question respecting the nuns of the good Jesus, at Ravenna?”

“Only thus much, holy mother, that their visitor is not considered competent to decide it; and that a convocation of as many superiors throughout the state of the church, as can be prevailed on to attend, is to be holden at Ravenna, on the tenth of next month.”

“It is not often, as your lordship knows,” re-

plied the Abbess, “that I obey these requisitions ; for I think I do more good by remaining within the walls of my own convent—but on this occasion I shall attend, for I feel much interest in the decision.”

It chanced that as the Abbess said this, the eyes of Juliet were again fixed on the face of Isidore ; and she observed a smile of remarkable, expression, though to her perfectly unintelligible upon his lips : but it passed in a moment, for when he raised his head from the bow, by which alone he had replied to the speech of the Abbess, all trace of it was gone.

The Abbot had laid the Count’s letter on his table without reading it, but he now testified his interest in his former pupil, by inquiring for his health, and that of his son ; after expressing his satisfaction at the favourable answer, he continued :—

“The convent of the Santa Croce is ever the object of the Count’s pious munificence, I hope?”

“I have every reason to believe so, my lord,” replied the Abbess, “his present confessor is a brother of the community.”

“They have some eminently pious men among them,—there is one in particular, the brother Dominic, who is an honour to his profession. Do you chance to know, holy mother, if my lord, your brother, be much acquainted with him?”

“I did not hear him named, my lord.”

“Then you have never seen him, holy mother?”

“Never.”

Here the conversation rested for some minutes; but the Abbess revived it by saying:—

“A confessor of course, was with my children yesterday; can you tell me, my lord, how it fares with the daughter who has so lately joined us?—sister Camilla, I mean—I greatly fear her health is failing.”

Juliet was again (drawn by curiosity too powerful to resist) earnestly watching the countenance of the Abbot, and again she was struck by the effect her aunt’s words produced on it. He almost started as she uttered the name of the nun; but, after a moment, replied in his usual placid tone, that Father Simione had not mentioned the state of her health.

“ I, too, thought she looked delicate,” he continued,—“ but she appears a pious and obedient nun. What have you found her, most holy mother, in these more important respects?”

“ Every thing that I could wish, my lord,” replied Geraldine, earnestly ; “ she is an amiable and most interesting woman, and I trust our fine sea air, and our tender care for her, will ere long restore her health.”

The Abbess now rose from the table, and thanking her stately entertainer for his hospitality, signified her wish to proceed on her journey. The party re-entered the sitting-room, and the Abbot sounded a small silver bell, which stood on the table. It was immediately answered by the appearance of a monk at the door. The inquiry—

“ Are the attendants of the Abbess of Sant Catherina’s in readiness ?” was answered in the affirmative.

A solemn “ Benedicite !” was uttered by the Abbot, and the closely veiled group departed, followed as before by Juliet.

In the ante-room she found her page ; his

merry eye sought hers, as if he had much to tell ; but a reproving glance sent him from her side ; and as she passed with a light and joyful step through the hated gate-way, she saw him holding her mule by the rein, with all the important gravity of office. As the Abbess rode with a slow and stately pace, Morgante continued to walk by the side of his mistress ; and as soon as they had turned a corner of the road, which took them completely out of sight of the convent gates, he drew from his bosom a glove, which he held up to her, saying—

“ Did you ever see a glove like that before, Signora ? ”

Juliet stooped forward, and took the glove in her hand,—she recollected it immediately, and said—

“ It is the glove my aunt found in the wood at Albano, Morgante.—Why did you not find the owner of it, as she told you to do ? ”

“ Because the owner was not in the castle, Signora, and the Lady Abbess gave me no orders to seek for him, out of it. But you are quite mistaken, Signora ; this is not the glove the Abbess gave me.”

“Then it is the fellow to it, Morgante—where did you find it?”

“Even in that holy mansion yonder that we have just quitted; I saw it lying on the window-seat of a room where the pious gentry vouchsafed us some food; I knew the reverend embroidery the instant I looked on it; and as I knew one glove was worth nothing—why, you know, Signora, I took nothing when I contrived, while peering out of the dark casement, to thrust this into my bosom.”

“You were wrong to take it, boy; nevertheless,” said Lady Juliet, pushing forward her mule to reach the side of her aunt; and as soon as she had overtaken her, she put the glove into her hand.

It was some time before the Abbess recollected the circumstance of having found a glove, and when she did, she was by no means able to identify its fellow.

“I cannot say that the gloves may not be alike, my dear child,” said she, “for in truth I know not, as accurately as you seem to do, the colour and ornaments of the one I gave your page; but

I think you will find you are mistaken, if Morgante has still the means of comparing the two together."

"Yes, I have, holy mother," said the boy, who was still close to Juliet's side, "I have the fellow to this glove packed away safely with my best jacket; I thought it too pretty to be lost, and there was no one in the castle who would own it."

"Did you show it to the monks who accompanied me from St. Andrea's, Morgante? As you found it there, I have little doubt that it belongs to one of them."

"No, holy mother, indeed it does not; for they not only told me it did not belong to them; but added, one and all of them, that such dainty silk embroidery suited not the lowly and pious brethren of St. Andrea's."

"Then I confess," replied the Abbess, "that I am quite unable to explain the mystery; and, moreover, am ready to allow, which is what Juliet and you want me to do,—that it really is one."

The lofty and extensive walls of Sant' Catherina's were soon in sight; and as her aunt was silent, Juliet occupied herself in trying to analyze her own feelings as she approached them.

It was not easy to do so ; but, perhaps, curiosity was that which predominated.

It was not that a convent was new to her ; she had passed several years in one : but this circumstance tended rather to increase than diminish her curiosity. She knew perfectly well how an abbess ruled, and how nuns and novices obeyed ; but then it was a catholic abbess, presiding over an institution, founded on her own principles ; her aunt had declared herself a protestant. How could this be ?

Juliet knew little of controversy ; but in those days it was impossible to live either in a convent, or out of it, without hearing, almost daily, that the whole Christian world were at deadly issue upon the subject of religion.

Catholics and protestants, or rather, in the phraseology to which she was accustomed, the true church and the heretics, were waging a war together, more stedfast in hate, and more savagely cruel in tactics, than had ever before desolated the earth. Yet her noble aunt was both a faithful protestant, and a most esteemed Abbess.—Again Juliet internally exclaimed—“ How can this be ? ”

Her own strange and doubtful situation, too, hung heavily upon her heart; and when she thought of the change she was making from the unfettered occupation of her own time, and the full enjoyment of nature, to the formal, heavy, unvarying, routine of a convent, the recollection of which was so hateful to her—she looked so grave, so lost in thought, and so perfectly unlike her gay young self, that the Abbess, as she watched her descending from her mule, was startled by her altered looks, and received her almost in her arms, with an earnest inquiry if she felt unwell. The look, the voice of Geraldine, at once produced their wonted effect. Juliet again forgot every thing, but that she was with her, and stepped forward, under the dark archway, if not gaily, at least with the soothing consciousness of depending for protection upon the person from whom she most wished to receive it.

THE END OF VOL. I.

Re Allen

extract from review from

Sunday Herald

-x- John Bull

-x- Athenaeum

p ii Cornhill Magazine Oct. III. 14

Aug. 1833

-x- "In almost every page we recognise the same strong and untripped spirit, the same leaning to the picturesque side of everything, the same love of heightening the effect of all, and not a little of the same liking for brown delineations which we perceived in her *Dom. in d. a.* Vigorously some of the chapters of *The Abbeys* are equal to anything in the language for liveliness and truth."

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